BLACK FAIRIES



'CATCH HIM, THEN,' CRIED TOM, HOLDING FOX HIGH IN THE AIR.

*Frontispiece*

# BLACK FAIRIES

BY

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TO

PATRICIA

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# Black Fairies

'SHALL I run up or walk up?' Hester asked.

'Walk up.'

'Running's more like flying.'

'Walking makes it longer.'

One little foot followed another up the narrow staircase, and at the curve Hester paused.

'What happens beyond?' she asked.

'Oh, it's all enchanted,' Hugo told her. 'Everything is just what you see, only it's all golden.'

'Are you and I golden, too?'

'Yes, and Nurse, and Miss Mildred.'

I glanced at Nurse.

'*That's always his way, ma'am. I hope you'll excuse him. Nothing satisfies him but it must be golden.*'

'O Nurse, it's delightful!' I cried.

Hugo's words carried me back to my own early dreams, when everything 'beyond' was seen in a haze of golden light.

At the curve I paused for a moment, just as Hester had done.

Nurse touched my arm respectfully.

'They'll be getting into mischief, ma'am'; and I hurried on hardly knowing what I expected, but it was a relief to see the children seated side by side on the front seat.

'Do you see the horses, Hester? They're dragons, and they are carrying us through the air. Soon we shall be in the clouds.'

Hester drew in her breath.

'Shall we walk on the clouds?' she asked, in a voice of awe.

'We'll *be* there,' said Hugo impatiently.

Hester looked hurt, and I drew out my purse quickly.

'Who can hold a penny without dropping it?'

'I can,' and 'I can.'

The children turned round expectantly.

'I have four pennies,' I said, 'two for each of you: but if I let you pay for the tickets, you must be very careful to keep them safely. Can I trust you?'

'Yes,' they said.

They held the pennies tightly till the conductor came round, when the exchange was made in great solemnity.

'That's right. Now, if you keep the tickets carefully, you may have them to take home.'

'All of them?'

'Mine, certainly; and Nurse's too, if you ask her, I think.'

'Hester, you 've got Nurse's ticket. You ask her.'

'No,' she said quickly. 'I 've got mine and Miss Mildred's.'

'No, you haven't, Hester. I meant all along that I was carrying Miss Mildred's. I said so to myself when I gave up the penny.'

'So did I.'

Hester's mouth closed firmly, and the children glared at one another.

'Let me see the tickets,' I interposed. The four little hands were thrown open.

'Give them to me for a minute.'

I marked them with my pencil—H. and H., M. and N.

'What do you think these letters stand for?'

'I don't know.'

'They are for our names. H. for Hugo

and Hester; N. for Nurse, M. for Miss Mildred.'

The children looked interested.

'Now, Hester, which is your right hand?'

'This.'

'And Hugo's left?'

'This one.'

Their fingers closed over the two tickets marked with H., and the children looked anxious.

'Who is to have yours, Miss Mildred?' they asked.

'Why, both of you,' I said, 'and you are both to hold Nurse's ticket. Join hands, Hugo—your right and Hester's left. Now leave a little space in between. There! In go the tickets as if they were letters into a pillar-box.'

The children laughed.

'That's better than quarrelling, isn't it?'

'Yes,' they said, and laughed again.

'Let's put in the other tickets too,' Hugo suggested, in a whisper; and when this was done, the children turned round.

'Why, Miss Hester, you haven't been and lost your ticket already?' asked Nurse, seeing her open hand.

'My hand's empty too,' said Hugo, and the children looked at each other and chuckled.

'Dear me! what can have happened to the tickets? Have they fallen on the ground?'

'No.'

'Have you put them in your pockets? Look again, Master Hugo; and you too, Miss Hester. Are they not there?'

'No.'

'Dear me, what careless children!' said Nurse, but at this they could contain themselves no longer.

'They aren't lost. They're here,' they shouted, and displayed the four tickets safely tucked away in their hot little hands.

'I thought of it,' said Hugo.

'And I posted mine,' Hester added.

'And so did I.'

The children laughed gleefully, and laid their heads together with talk of the wonderful land for which they were bound.

'We leave England far below us, quite, quite out of sight—all the shops and the people—and we pass through Fairyland.'

'What's Fairyland like, Hugo?' Hester loved a definite picture.

'Oh, you know, Hester: it's all green and golden.'

'Yes,' she sighed. 'Couldn't we stop there, and walk through it?'

'Oh no. There wouldn't be time. We're going much further than that—right into the sun.'

'Hugo, did you know there were black fairies?'

'We'll get into the sun when it's setting,' Hugo went on. 'It comes quite low down; and we'll step through the clouds—past them, you know—and find ourselves in the middle of the sun. Won't that be nice, Hester?'

'Yes. Hugo, did you know there were black fairies? There are, you know.'

Hester nodded her head to emphasise her words.

'Black fairies?'

'There are, Hugo. Miss Mildred knows all about them.'

Hugo twisted himself round, and gazed into my face.

'Hester says there are black fairies. Can you tell me about them?'

'Some day, perhaps; but our ride is over. We get down here.'

# Black Fairies

'Where are we going, Miss Mildred?' Hester slipped her hand into mine, and I looked at Nurse apologetically.

'We are going to have tea now, at a little shop near here. Are you hungry?'

'I should think so!' said Hugo, as Nurse began to demur.

'Sponge-cake and milk, Nurse,' I begged. 'It can't possibly hurt them, and it's a treat for me. You shall have a cup of tea.'

We entered the little shop in great glee, and I ordered milk and sponge-cakes, and a room 'all to ourselves.'

When tea was over, we found there was an hour to wait for our returning 'bus, and the children asked for a story.

'About black fairies,' said Hugo, and Hester seconded him.

'O Hester, you know that story always makes you cry.'

'But Hugo wants to hear it, and I like it.'

'It's a very sad story, Hugo,' I warned him.

'I don't care.'

'Very well. You must know then, children, that there are hundreds and hundreds of fairies in the world.'

'In Fairyland,' murmured Hugo.

'They are called the Fairies of Deeds,' I went on, 'and they come into this world of ours whenever the Deeds spring to life. Beautiful fairies spring into being with beautiful Deeds; and with bad, ugly Deeds come hideous, deformed gnomes.'

'Imps,' suggested Hugo.

'Hush!' said Hester.

'These misshapen creatures are very ugly to look upon, and men are rightly afraid at the thought of them; but my story is about a different kind of being altogether.'

# Black Fairies

'It's about black fairies, isn't it?' asked Hugo, but Hester pulled at his sleeve.

'O Hugo, do listen and don't talk.'

'As soon as a Thought is formed in a person's mind, a little fairy in Fairyland begins to get ready to take its place in the world. If the Thought is one of kindness and love, there is great preparation in the Royal Palace, for the most beautiful fairies are to be found there. And if the Thought is one of unkindness, the deepest dungeons are searched for the ugliest imp that can be found; and so, as you may imagine, there is a constant stir in fairy realms. As I said before, as soon as a Thought begins to shape itself in the mind, a little fairy begins its preparations. It smooths its dress, trims its wings, and combs its hair: and just before the Idea turns into a Deed, down flies the fairy as quick as thought, and there it stands beside the Deed, ready to be its

little servant and do its will. Now, imagine for a moment the feelings of one of these little fairies on landing upon this earth, should it find that there were no work for it to do—no master to obey!'

'Could that be?' Hugo asked.

'Yes indeed, Hugo, for you must remember that there are many Thoughts—kind Thoughts—that rise in a person's mind, and yet never get the length of becoming Deeds.'

Hugo nodded.

'The fairy's first thought is one of dismay. What is its work? it wonders. What possessed it to leave the joys of beautiful golden Fairyland before being *quite* certain that there would be a place for it, a work for it, on earth? And oh! what can have happened to it on its passage through the air? For it has become black—face and hands, wings and all—black in every part.

And moreover,' I went on, 'it has lost the use of its voice. It is dumb.'

'And deaf,' sobbed Hester, leaning her head against my shoulder.

Hugo kicked his feet against the bars of his chair.

'Is that the end of the story?' he asked.

'Tell him the rest,' Hester whispered; and I began—

'Once upon a time there lived a little girl. She had a garden all of her own. In this garden there was a rose-bush of which she was exceedingly proud, for every summer it bore twelve red roses.

'As well as the roses, there were other flowers—pansies, mignonette, and daisies, for the garden was a very pretty garden; but, besides her flowers, she had a plant of which she was very fond.

'It was a strawberry plant, and when summer came there were six beautiful

berries, redder than the rose, and the little girl thought she had never seen anything so lovely.

'She said to herself, "What shall I do with all my berries?" for she felt that she was very rich indeed; and no wonder. Then she thought, "I know a little boy who has no garden of his own. He is fond of strawberries, for he told me so."

'And while this Thought was passing through her mind, up in Fairyland there was quite a flutter of excitement, for one little fairy was preparing for a flight to earth just as fast as she could get ready, and she feared lest she should be late.

'Then the Thought went on—

'"I will give my berries to the little boy," and down came the fairy in a flash, all ready for her work; but alas! alas! the fairy had come too soon. She was black!'

'I ate the strawberries, Hugo,' Hester

sobbed; 'I meant to give them to you, but I ate them all.'

'Never mind, Hester, I don't mind.'

'O Hugo, but the fairy is black—and dumb—and it can't ever be white again.'

'Can't it?' asked Hugo shortly.

I shook my head.

'That's the sad part,' I said. 'It can't.'

Hugo blinked.

'Don't cry, Hester. Were the strawberries good?'

'Yes, very.'

'Then I'm glad you had them,' he said stoutly. 'What happens to the imps when they have no masters?' he went on.

'That's the nice part. When they find there is nothing for them to do, they first of all become transparent, then they gradually shrivel up till there is nothing of them left at all.'

'Not a scrap?'

'Not one bit of them; and so there is one imp less in the world.'

'Is there a story about an imp doing that?'

'Two imps shrivelled up this very afternoon.'

'Did they? How do you know?'

'Because I know that two little friends of mine who were sitting close together had some rather curious Thoughts this afternoon.

'One of the Thoughts said, "I should like to pinch Hugo."

'And another said, "I should like to pinch Hester, and bite her too."'

'I think my imp must have been the ugliest,' Hugo remarked meditatively. 'Would they have claws, do you suppose?'

'I expect they would.'

'Hugo's would have long teeth as well.'

The children laughed to think of the dis-

appointment of these hideous creatures on finding that there would be no work for them to do.

'For when they were done with you and Hester,' I told them, 'they would have turned round and pinched Nurse and me.'

'If you please, ma'am, there's the 'bus coming.'

Nurse's words recalled us to the immediate present, and we hurried into the street.

The children clambered up to their old places, and Nurse and I followed.

'Will you be here for long, ma'am?' she asked me.

'Only a few more days,' I said; 'I go home next week.'

# FOX

I

'You mutely sit
Musing by firelight, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it.'

HELEN seemed an embodiment of the words she read as she gazed into the fire she loved so well—that fire which ever held out to her new mysteries to be pondered over—which ever brought back the old message, 'Give, and give, and give.' It seemed to her an emblem of love that must pour itself out to the uttermost, asking for nothing, giving all.

'To give, to give, not to receive,
I long to pour myself, my soul;
Not to keep back, or count, or leave,
But, king with king, to give the whole.'

Helen spoke the words softly to herself in the half-darkness of her little room, and then came her opportunity, for in another instant the peaceful current of her thoughts was interrupted.

Loud voices and a rush of feet; a sudden silence, and then a knock at the door.

'We 've come to see if you can come, Helen?' Hugh began, in an even tone, but Tom was vehement in his demands.

'O Helen, will you come? We can't do anything to stop her. She just goes on and on. She 's awful!'

Tom's efforts to 'stop her' had resulted in a rumpled collar and ruffled hair.

In Helen's presence he became conscious of his defects, jerked his collar more or less into place, and made ineffective little dabs at his hair.

Hugh looked down at an ink-stained

finger, and hoped that in the darkness it might fail to be noticed.

There was something about Helen's presence, a freshness, a daintiness, that seemed to require a corresponding atmosphere in those about her, and even these little wild schoolboy brothers were unconsciously influenced by this atmosphere of purity in which she moved.

'Norah? Is something wrong with Norah?' Helen asked, putting aside her book as she spoke.

'We can't make out what's wrong, Helen. She's been crying ever since tea-time. Not roaring, you know, just cry, cry, cry. You can't think how disagreeable it is to prepare beside her.'

'Impossible,' put in Hugh.

'We stood it for a long time,' Tom went on, 'and then I begged her—most politely—to stop. Didn't I, Hugh?'

'Quite politely.'

'But she hasn't stopped for all that, and her banky is all soppy, and would you mind coming to see what's wrong?'

(How many times a day came the same request!)

What a difference there is in fires! What is it that makes one pour out all its wealth of heat and light and comfort, holding nothing back? What makes another give grudgingly of its store, hiding its glowing treasure behind grey ashes and smoke? Is it only the question of a *touch*, after all?

Helen's first care was for the fire, and when it had taken on a more cheerful blaze, she turned to the little tear-stained sister at the schoolroom table.

'That's a better fire, isn't it?' she said. 'Tom, I will put you in charge. Don't let it go out. Are you doing lessons now, Norah?'

'No.'

'Suppose, then, we leave these busy gentlemen at work, while we go and amuse ourselves?'

Norah smiled faintly, and suffered herself to be carried off to Helen's room, but there her tears came afresh.

Helen had the child in her arms in a moment.

'Poor little girl, what is wrong? Tell me all about it,' she murmured, pushing back the hair from Norah's forehead with her cool, dear fingers. They were such strong, tender fingers.

Years afterwards, with the first breath of trouble, came the thought of Helen's touch, and the very remembrance brought with it a sense of healing and help.

'Poor child! has something happened to trouble you? Can you tell me about it? Something gone very wrong, dearest?'

'No, it's not that, Helen. I don't think

you would understand. I don't think any one would understand.'

'Tell me, dear, if you can. Has any one hurt you?'

'No, Helen, but somebody's forgotten. Somebody promised. Mother promised, Helen, but she's forgotten.'

'Promised to do something?'

'Yes.'

'To give you something?'

'Yes.'

'But, dear child, if mother promised to give you this thing, she has only to be reminded of her promise. When people have a great many things to carry about in their minds, it is no wonder if now and again some promise slips behind all the other busy things, and gets hidden there until it is brought out and looked at and remembered. I am sure mother will remember, if we tell her about it.'

'I know, Helen, oh! I know; but it isn't that.'

'There is something else, dear?'

'Yes.'

'Something mixed up with the promise?'

'Yes.'

Helen was puzzled. How could she make her way past all the trouble right into the little girl's mind?

'Tell me what mother promised to give you, dear.'

'It was her fur, Helen—her fox. Long ago, when it was quite new, she promised that I might have it when she was done with it. O Helen! and it has such beautiful teeth, and they can bite. Mother tried once, to show me; and they are sharp, quite sharp, and they hurt, Helen, they really do; and she promised that I might have it for my very own; she promised.'

'And now she has forgotten?'

'Yes, Helen, but it isn't that. It's Miss Nimmo. Mother said she would give it to Miss Nimmo, because she's so poor. Mrs. Cary was telling her about it, and I heard mother say she would give it; and O Helen, I do want her to have it if she's so poor, but oh! my fox, my fox!'

Helen drew the child closer. How could she help this poor, passionate little sister? Could she not, in her love, impart a little of her own strength to this storm-tossed little soul?

O calm strength—she thought—sweet peace! Are they not to be *shared* with other of God's good gifts?

Something of her own peace did, in time, make itself felt by the child, for though the tears still fell, her sobbing grew less violent.

'I will let her have it, Helen,' she said at last.

'Poor little girl! It has been very hard.'

'Yes, but that's not all, Helen,' she whispered. 'It is so horrid to have been horrid.'

'I know, dear.'

'O Helen, you don't know how horrid; but my fox, my own, very own dear fox. O Helen, Helen!'

She was tired out by this time, and cried quietly with Helen's arm around her, while Helen turned for comfort to her ever-loved fire.

'Why, Norah!' she exclaimed at last, 'the fire has given me an idea. Look at it—that little black coal with the sharp nose—do you see?'

'Yes,' she answered listlessly.

'Oh, but you must look up and help me to plan. Don't you see what it is saying?'

'No.'

'Look at its merry little eyes. Why—it

says—I never saw such foolish people in my life! To waste their time bemoaning what need never take place.'

'What does it mean, Helen?'

'Why—it says—you foolish people, no one feels better disposed towards Miss Nimmo than I do; no one can appreciate the comfort of warmth more than I (it ought to know, oughtn't it?); and yet you don't find me sighing and crying—I plan.'

'I don't understand.'

'Why—it suggests—Miss Nimmo would not know what to do with a little fox's head. She wants a nice fur collar to keep the cold wind off her poor throat—doesn't she, Norah?'

'Yes.'

'Why don't you, then, you foolish people, cut off the little head with the dear white sharp teeth, and cut off the little fat bushy tail, and make two people

happy—one with a nice, warm fur collar, and one with a dear, tiny little fox?'

'O Helen!'

'Two people *happy*, it says, so run off and wash all the tears away.'

She kissed the child and sent her away comforted, and by the time Norah came back—a different creature—Helen's work-box was on the table, and a heap of coloured ribbons beside it.

'And now, Norah, I am going to find mother, and tell her of our clever plans, while you choose a ribbon to tie round the fox's neck.'

'I don't know which to have,' Norah began breathlessly, as Helen entered the room carrying the fur over her arm. 'Which would look nicest, do you think?'

'Wait a little,' Helen suggested. 'Wait until I have made the little fox, and then we'll see.'

# Fox.

The head was cut off first, and Helen turned towards the tail, scissors in hand.

'Oh, wait!' Norah pleaded. 'Could we, do you think? Would there be enough for Miss Nimmo, I mean? Couldn't we give it a wee little bit of body—just enough to hold its soul?' Norah asked anxiously.

Helen measured.

'I could spare an inch,' she said.

'O Helen, could you? It wouldn't be selfish, would it?' very softly.

Helen measured again.

'No. I could spare just an inch.'

Norah sighed.

'Oh, it will be the loveliest fox, the loveliest, dearest, nicest fox in the world! Don't you think it will, Helen?'

'It will be a very tiny fox, I fear,' she answered.

A very curious little fox it certainly was,

with its sharp face and long bushy tail, and little bit of a body in between; but in Norah's eyes it was the sweetest, dearest little creature in the world; and when the stitches were carefully hidden by a bow of blue ribbon, Norah's joy knew no bounds.

'O you dear Fox!' she sang; 'you dear, soft, fluffy Fox! Say thank you, thank you, thank you, Helen, for making me so very beautiful!'

That night the little Fox lay with its head on Norah's pillow. She had discovered that it could have no greater happiness than in listening to the tales she told.

There was a certain monotony about the tales that evening (they were all based on the same theme), but the little Fox listened to each of them with the same contented expression.

# Fox

'Once upon a time there lived a beauteous lady who seemed to be a step-sister, and everybody thought she was one. But all the time she was a Royal Princess in disguise.

'And she used to sing and sing, and everybody wondered where she learned her beautiful songs, but no one could tell.

'And she lived upon nothing but—but apples of righteousness; and she knew all about birds and flowers and things that can't speak—and she knew what they said. And . . . and, one day it was discovered that she was a Royal Princess, and that a throne was waiting for her, right at the top of a golden staircase.

'So she walked up the steps, straight to the very top, and there she sat on her beautiful golden throne, and reigned, and reigned, and reigned.'

But even for a Royal Princess, little Norah, golden steps are steep.

# Fox

II

After breakfast the next morning, Norah's trials began.

'Where is your wonderful Fox, Norah?' Tom asked, on his way to the schoolroom.

'It's here,' she answered, drawing it from behind her pinafore.

(What bright little eyes it had!)

'Hullo! Well, you are a beauty! Let me see him close, Norah. Will he bite?'

'No, of course not. Not unless you tease him. He *can* bite, though.'

'Can't he just! Why, what a temper he's got! See how he grinds his teeth! Beware of the Fox, Hugh. He'll bite! Beware, Norah.'

'Give him back to me, Tom. You'll spoil him. Give him back, I say.'

'Catch him, then,' cried Tom, holding Fox high in the air.

## Fox

'Give him back, Tom. He's mine, and you're not to touch him. Give him back!' cried Norah, stamping with rage.

'Well, you are a beauty!' Tom went on calmly. 'And pray, Norah, is this its neck or its waist? I am slightly puzzled, and ask for information.'

'Help me, Hugh! He's spoiling him. Oh, he'll pull off his tail! Oh, help me, help me!'

'Take him, by all means,' said Tom politely, handing back the little creature to his furious mistress. 'Hurry up, Hugh. We'll be late for school.'

When the boys were gone, Norah burst into a torrent of tears.

'O Fox!' she moaned, hugging her treasure close in her arms. 'O my darling, darling Fox! Oh,' she whispered, bending low, 'I didn't mean you ever to see me angry, dear, darling Fox. I didn't

think I could ever be angry again, Fox, I didn't, truly.'

Tom's teasing words were forgotten in this new trouble, and the tears fell fast at the thought that she had fallen in the eyes of her beloved pet.

They rained upon the little brown face held so close to her own, and when Norah looked down, she saw the fur all ruffled and disordered by the violence of her grief.

'I will stop, I will indeed, Fox, darling,' she murmured, drying his face hastily, for her heart smote her that she had caused the tears to come there.

'I won't cry any more. See, I have stopped,' she said, with an attempt at a smile.

Fox seemed to smile back, and Norah felt comforted; and when lesson-time arrived, Norah was quite ready to display her new treasure to Miss Winyard.

Lessons seemed long that morning, for

Norah's thoughts were all with Fox. Poor Fox, laid away in the top drawer, and longing for a little breath of air and a scamper on imaginary feet, and, from time to time, for a peep at his mistress, who longed no less ardently for a little peep at him.

'I may take him out, mayn't I, Miss Winyard?' Norah asked anxiously, when lessons were ended. 'I'll keep him in my muff and only let his eyes peep out, and he won't be any trouble.'

III

The only drawback to Norah's happiness lay in the fact that neither Hugh nor Tom ever let slip an opportunity of teasing Fox, and thus tormenting his little mistress, who grew exceedingly sensitive on his account.

Poor Norah had a hard fight at times

to keep her temper, for the boys encouraged each other, and many a time she fell unwittingly into their traps.

One day she felt immensely flattered when Hugh asked her to help him with his Latin exercise.

(It was *the* ambition of Norah's life to learn Latin.)

'Am I to do the Latin part?' she asked, in a voice trembling with eagerness.

'You don't know Latin, do you?'

'No.'

'Then how do you propose to do the Latin part? Of course not. You are to read the English, and I'll write the Latin. Do you see?'

'Yes.'

'All right. Begin here.'

(Why was Tom listening?)

Norah began: 'It is a matter of some difficulty——'

'All right.'

'To compare the qualities of different animals——'

'Ready.'

'The lion, often called the king of beasts——'

'Never mind that bit, Norah. Skip the next two sentences. Go on.'

'By his cunning and duplicity,' Norah went on.

Why was Tom looking?

Norah became suspicious, read to herself the rest of the sentence, and turned with blazing eyes on her brothers, for alas! the words, as she feared, described the characteristics of the fox!

'Oh, mean!' she cried, shaking with anger. 'Mean! mean! mean!'

'Neat,' said Tom laughing, 'very, very neat. Most excellent! Most neat!'

Poor Norah! She felt that she must

get out of the schoolroom at once, before she did some dreadful, wicked thing to avenge herself on her brothers. But where was she to go?

She dare not trust herself in her own room, for there she would find Fox laid away for safety (it was never safe to leave him in the schoolroom), and Fox must never see her in a passion again.

And then, she knew, her fury would spend itself in a flood of tears, and Fox must never know that it was on his account they were shed.

Norah flew down the passage not knowing exactly where her steps would lead her, but finding herself, somehow, crouched against Helen's door; and there she lay, smothering her sobs until Helen came out to see what was wrong.

But even Helen could do nothing for her, since she could not make her trouble

known without telling tales, and she must never, never tell tales, not though they had killed Fox, hanged him by the neck (or the waist), drowned him, or burned him in the fire.

Norah's eyes blazed as her imagination carried her from one scene to another, in each of which she stood by helpless while Fox was being slowly done to death before her eyes.

Helen could do nothing to calm her at first, but gradually the fierce look left Norah's face, and she fell asleep in Helen's arms, for all at once she felt very, very tired.

When she awoke, she found herself on Helen's sofa. The lights were low, and it seemed to her that her brothers were bending over her, and muttering, 'Didn't think you'd mind.' Norah felt so sleepy that she could only hold up a little white

face to be kissed, and then . . . it was morning.

Morning brought about a compromise, and an agreement was drawn up and duly signed by Hugh, Tom, and Norah. Fox was to have the freedom of the schoolroom on condition that neither he nor Norah should take offence at any remark made by anybody on his appearance, temper, or general character.

'I don't think it's a fair agreement,' Norah objected, when the conditions were first proposed.

'Not fair? What's not fair?' Tom fired up.

'Well, Fox has to sit there quietly, and listen to all the horrid things you say against him, and not mind, but just sit there quietly and smile.'

'No one forces him to smile.'

'But he always does, he's so sweet. And

I don't see what advantage he is to get by sitting in the schoolroom to be teased.'

'Look here, Norah, you're just as silly as silly can be. First of all, do you think we are going to spend all our precious time teasing your stupid old Fox?'

Norah looked dangerous, so Tom went on quickly—

'Of course we won't. All we say is that if we do happen to tease him now and again, you won't flare up into a temper. Now look here, Norah, do be reasonable. You don't mind a scrap when we call you Rat's-tail and Freckles, do you?'

'No.'

'Of course you don't. Then why should you mind when we say something equally harmless about Fox? He is ugly, you must admit.'

'I don't,' said Norah.

'Oh no! Of course you think him per-

fect, we all know that. But the point is, if you don't mind our making remarks on *your* personal appearance, why should you mind when we tell you that Fox is ugly?'

Reasoning is all very well, thought Norah, but there is a difference, all the same.

She changed the subject.

'If I sign the agreement,' she asked, 'you won't let Fox feel uncomfortable when he comes to the schoolroom? You won't let him think that he's not wanted?'

'Of course not! What a fuss you make, Norah! Do hurry up and sign, or we'll be late for school.'

So peace reigned once more; and after that, when the boys made remarks about Fox, Norah pressed her hands tightly together and pretended 'hard' that they were addressed to herself, and so the agreement was kept unbroken.

# Fox

## IV

'Tom, Tom! have you heard? Has Hugh told you?'

'Hullo, Norah! what's all the row about?'

'Hasn't Hugh told you, Tom? Mother is out, and Helen is coming to tea, and we're to have a cake, mother says.'

'Hurrah!'

'O Tom, how greedy! But come quick and help me to make buttered toast. O Fox, Fox, Fox! Helen's coming—aren't you glad?' Norah danced round the room, toasting-fork in hand.

'Keep still, Norah, can't you! How can I put my things away with you dancing around?'

'Helen's coming!' Norah sang, as she pressed her face against the high bars of the fender.

Helen came; but alas for their preparations, she did not come to stay.

'I am so sorry, dear,' she said, 'but a message has come that I am wanted, and I must go at once. Tell the boys that I will come another day instead.'

The tears gathered in Norah's eyes.

'O Helen, must you go? They have just gone to put on clean collars, and we're making buttered toast.'

But Helen could not stay.

(Long ago, Norah had been overheard explaining to her little cousin Betty that her sister Helen was called a stepsister, because she always stepped in whenever she was wanted. Since then, she had come to realise that there cannot be a stepping in without a going out.)

Three disappointed children do not make a lively tea-table, especially when disappointment tends to make them cross.

# Fox

'Why are there four chairs, Norah?' growled Tom.

'One was for Helen.'

'Oh, I know that; but why haven't you taken it away? It looks silly—as if you were expecting some one.'

'Take it away, then. I've been busy buttering the toast, and I can't do everything at once.'

'Nobody said you could, but you seem to have had time enough to pick up a temper.'

Norah glared at Tom, but said nothing. How could she, with Fox looking up in her face with his smiling eyes?

'Helen said we can each have a slice of cake,' Norah announced later. 'Hugh is to cut it, and he is to give us big pieces.'

'Have you nearly finished tea, Norah?' asked Tom, when his own slice had disappeared.

'Yes, I am done.'

'You haven't eaten your cake. What are you saving it for?' he asked suspiciously.

'I'm not going to tell you.'

'It's disgustingly greedy—like saving all your currants till the end.'

Norah said nothing. She wrapped the cake in her handkerchief, and Tom concluded that she meant to produce it later and share it with her brothers. She had done such things before, and Tom reflected that Norah was not such a bad little thing after all, . . . and so buried himself in Euclid.

Norah betook herself to French Verbs, and an hour passed in comparative silence.

Hugh was always a quiet person, and as it took a great deal to disturb him, it was some time before he became conscious of a scuffle in the direction of the fireplace.

When he did look up, it was to find Norah leaning half across the fender, struggling to free herself from Tom, who clutched wildly at something she held in her right hand.

'What a noise you two are making!' grumbled Hugh. 'What is the matter this time?'

'Hugh, tell him to leave me alone. He's hurting me. He has no business to touch me. Tell him, Hugh.'

Norah was too angry even to cry.

'Leave her alone, Tom. What's all the fuss about?'

'She's burning her cake,' cried Tom excitedly, still making frantic dashes at Norah's hand. 'I couldn't believe my eyes at first. That's what she saved it for, and I thought she meant it for us. She's *burning* it, I say.'

'What are you burning it for, Norah?'

asked Hugh, from the far end of the room. He wondered how she could be so silly.

But at this moment Tom wrenched the cake from Norah's hand, and stuffed it triumphantly into his mouth.

And now tears of rage and shame came from poor Norah. She rocked herself disconsolately to and fro before the fire—for Fox was there, Fox had seen her. She could not bear to look at him.

There was no need to fly from the schoolroom on this occasion, for Fox had been present the whole time.

O Fox, Fox! and how often she had resolved that he should never again see her anything but gentle and sweet!

Was this the right moment for Helen to step in?

She came, at any rate, and was down beside Norah in a moment, and something

in her face drew the two boys from their books.

'It's my fault, Helen,' muttered Tom, for he realised that he had been decidedly greedy. After all, he reflected, the cake was Norah's, and she had every right to burn it if she chose. Still, it was silly. No, he was quite right to save it from the fire, only he should not have eaten it afterwards—at least, not without Norah's consent.

'It wasn't altogether Tom's fault,' said Hugh, feeling that Norah was getting undue sympathy. 'Tom saw that Norah was throwing her cake into the fire, and he rushed forward to prevent it, and then, when he got it, Norah began to cry.'

'Why did you do it, dear?' asked Helen, puzzled.

'It was my cake, Helen.'

'But what made you burn it?'

'It was mine, Helen. I didn't eat it at tea. Tom ate his, and so did Hugh, and I didn't eat mine; and I didn't burn it . . . first . . .' she said, lowering her voice.

Helen's thoughts carried her to that other fireside from which she had just returned.

But for her presence in that other home there would have been no fire, for the child she had held in her arms towards its blaze knew what hunger was, and cold; and the poor ailing mother had spent all she had on bread for the hungry little mouth, so that there had been no fire for two days. No fire, and the cold was piercing!

O Norah, why did you burn the cake? The reason came at last, for Norah knew that Helen would understand.

'I saved it for Fox,' she sobbed. 'I didn't eat one crumb, and I gave it to him to eat in his mouth, but it wouldn't go down—just as far as his throat—and how could I give it to Tom after it had been eaten? It wouldn't have been real eating; and Fox did bite it, really and truly. Tom said it was greedy to save it—like keeping currants, he said—but it wasn't for me, Helen, and it was my cake.'

Helen told of the little girl in that other street, and Norah's tender heart was touched at once.

'Helen, if I had known that she was so hungry, I would have given my cake to her. I would have pretended that Fox had eaten it; I would, Helen, only I didn't know. And oh, Helen, Fox isn't real, and he wasn't *really* hungry, we just pretended he was, and now he will be

dreadfully sorry, and it is all my fault, and I didn't know.'

This was the bitterest thought — that Fox, her own precious, thoughtful, unselfish Fox, should have been forced to act carelessly by his thoughtless mistress.

If only this could have been kept from his knowledge! But it was now too late, since he must have heard everything.

Was that a tear on his little face?

## V

'For the very last time,' said Helen smiling, for when last year's muslin frocks have been looked out, it is more than time to lay aside a muff.

It ought, of course, to have been put away six weeks ago; but what little girl of nine years could think of appearances when a muff represents all that can transform the

dullest walk into a state of enchantment—when a muff contains a snug little nest, and the nest contains the dearest little creature in the world?

Norah sighed, but in a moment her arms were flung round Helen's neck, for Helen was telling Miss Winyard that the walk was to be a ride on the top of a 'bus, so that Fox might have the memory of the very happiest morning to console him, in future, when he should be left behind.

Norah held him up to be kissed by Helen.

. . . . .

'Norah, dear child, what has happened?'

Norah could not speak.

What had happened?

Even Miss Winyard found it difficult to explain.

Fox lost!

But how could that be?

# Fox

*How could Fox have slipped from* Norah's hand without her knowledge?

Miss Winyard told of the sudden plunge of the horses; of Norah's cry as the little creature was jerked into the street; of her frantic efforts to reach him, and her inability to explain her loss, so that they had been carried far out of the way before Miss Winyard could grasp what had taken place; of the sorrowful, unsuccessful search, and the miserable journey home. All these things Miss Winyard told while Norah stood as if turned to stone.

She could not cry; she could not speak; she could not think.

'Fox is lost! Fox is lost!' The words repeated themselves over and over in her mind.

'Fox is lost!' and again 'Fox is lost!' but the dreary words conveyed no meaning.

# Fox

The long, dreadful day dragged to an end at last.

If it had not been for Helen, Norah thought, she could not have borne it. How good Helen was to her!

The boys were kind too, in their way, but they could not understand Norah's grief. They did not know that Fox was part of her life.

'Why don't you advertise for him?' suggested Tom.

'What would you say?' asked Hugh, chuckling. 'Lost—a head and tail joined by blue ribbon? I don't mean to be horrid, Norah, but when you come to think of it, you will find it extremely difficult to compose an advertisement.'

Helen had long been aware of this, and for some time her mind had been at work endeavouring to frame a suitable description of Fox. And because love is

a stronger force than even a sense of humour, a somewhat curiously worded advertisement did find its way into the morning paper.

But night has to come before morning, and poor Norah had to face her loss anew, for there was no little Fox on the pillow, no little comforting presence to whom she could explain this terrible trouble.

How had Helen divined that this hour would be the hardest of all for her little sister?

She sat beside her in the darkness, and held the hand that clung so tightly to her own; and they talked together of many things that were strange to Norah at that time.

When Norah cried at the thought that her beloved Fox might be dead, that she might never see him again, never, never in all her life, Helen asked—

'Norah, do you remember the night he first came to you?'

'Yes, oh yes,' she sobbed.

'Well, dear, you remember that we gave him a little bit of body—that was to hold his spirit, you remember?'

'Yes, Helen.'

'Now, I want you to think hard of what I ask you. Do you know what it is in Fox that has made you love him? Can you tell me?'

'It is everything about him, Helen. He is so beautiful . . . and so good . . . and his soft coat . . . and because he loves me, and everything.'

'Yes, dear, I know. There are many, many reasons; more than you can possibly put into words. It is not only for his little brown fur you love him, for even if he were to come back to you all spoilt and hurt, you would love him just the same.'

'O Helen, I would love him more. I would, I know I would.'

'I know, darling. It is for him in himself you love him, not only for his outward form. But these things — the things of his spirit — cannot be crushed out of him whatever may happen to the little body that wraps them round. Love and tenderness and patience — all these qualities that you see in Fox — are the things that never die. They have gone out into the world and become part of the world — part of its love and tenderness and patience. And so, whatever happens to the outward form, though you may never see it again, the real part — the spirit part — goes on for ever. You know how his presence has helped you all these months, Norah? The thought of Fox has kept you back from saying quick,

unkind words, more than once or twice—it has compelled you to give up your own way quietly; to think more often of other people, so that you might become less unworthy of his love. Hasn't it, dear?'

'Yes, Helen,' she whispered.

'And he has not always been present when these thoughts have come to you. Sometimes he has been in another room, sometimes in another part of the town, and yet all the time, though he has not been actually present, his spirit has been with you. Do you see how that can be?'

'Yes.'

'And so it may be still. His spirit may be with you every day, helping you to better things, although you may never see his visible form again. Do you understand, Norah?'

'Yes, Helen, I do, I do—but oh, I want his body too!'

## VI

Norah never saw him again.

One evening, several weeks after, she was sitting listlessly by the schoolroom window.

The door opened, and from Helen's face as she came in Norah guessed that she brought news of Fox.

'I have something to tell you, Norah,' she said slowly.

'O Helen!' Norah felt that the news was not all good.

'Do you remember one evening, a long time ago, in winter, I was sent for suddenly to see a poor woman?'

'Yes.'

Norah remembered well.

'She has one little girl, little Bessie. I told you about her, you remember? Well, dear, I have been to see her this afternoon. I scarcely recognised Bessie. All her curls have been cut short. She has been ill with fever, and for many weeks has been in the hospital.'

'Is she very ill, Helen?'

'She was very ill, Norah, but now she is well again. When she first became ill, her mother did not know what to do for her, Bessie was so fretful. She was restless and cried constantly, and her mother did not know how to soothe her. There was one thing, however, that quieted the child, and that was a little brown piece of fur that Mrs. Flynn had picked up in the street.'

'Fox!' cried Norah.

'Yes, dear, it was Fox. He was covered with dust, but Mrs. Flynn brushed his

coat, and laid him on the pillow beside Bessie; and when he was at her side, she seemed to forget her pain, and lay still for hours looking at her treasure.'

Norah's tears were falling, but she did not speak, and Helen went on with her story.

'The next morning, Bessie was known to have fever, and she was taken to the hospital, as I told you.

'After she left, the room had to be disinfected, and a great many things had to be burned.'

Norah put out her hand as if to shield herself from what was coming.

'O Helen, not that, not that!' she cried, shrinking back.

Helen gathered her up in her arms, and for a long, long time no word passed between the sisters: till at length, as the extent of the little sacrifice dawned upon

Norah's mind, a smile broke faintly through the tears.

'I am glad it was for Bessie,' she whispered at last.

# Two Stories of a Cake

I

'THIS will be fun,' said the fairies, when the King's proclamation went forth.

It was published by heralds in every part of the kingdom, and in a very short time it was known over the whole length and breadth of the land.

A cake for the King!

Such a cake as had never before been heard of, for every single fairy might take part in the making of this cake: might bring eggs or sugar or flour—as much as he could carry—to the royal kitchen.

The only conditions laid down in the

proclamation were that each fairy must carry his own little burden without help, and he must bring the whole of his offering at one time. Two journeys were not allowed.

Such busy, bustling days followed the announcement, and eager little people pressed forward, struggling under the weight of tiny bags of flour, or lumps of sugar, or dear little birds' eggs—pink and yellow and pale, pale blue.

It was funny to watch the little burden-bearers on their way to the Palace.

Some sallied forth in such hopefulness, their shoulders laden with packages nearly as large as themselves; but before the journey's end many a little sack had to be hoisted down, untied, and partially emptied.

Others started with such diminutive bundles that their neighbours laughed, and

called out, 'You won't have much of a finger in this pie,' and they laughed back and retorted, 'Penny Wise!'

And oh, the stir on the King's Highway, as the Royal Palace came in view! For the advancing stream of fairies was checked and blocked by the idle little people whose work was ended, and who stopped behind to see the fun.

Such crowding, such jostling, such chattering and laughing can scarcely be imagined, and the Royal Cooks were kept as busy as could be, running backwards and forwards in clean white caps and aprons, new for the occasion.

When all the ingredients were collected, the poor bewildered cooks felt quite distracted, for never in their lives had they seen so many supplies.

The Chief Cook was in such a state of perplexity, that he sent a special messenger

to the King to ask how the cake was to be made.

'Oh,' said the King, 'that is quite easy.'

He sent for the Chief Cook, and asked him—

'How many cooks have you got?'

'Two hundred and fifty, your Majesty.'

'And how many bowls have you got?'

'Two hundred and fifty, your Majesty.'

'And how many wooden spoons have you got?'

'Two hundred and fifty, your Majesty.'

'Then,' said the King, 'let each of the cooks mix a part of the cake in his own little bowl, and the difficulty will be solved.'

Soon the clatter of two hundred and fifty wooden spoons could be heard in two hundred and fifty bowls, and in a very short time the mountains of supply were transformed into the most delicious, creamy mixture.

# Two Stories of a Cake

It looked so good, that all the little, idle, greedy fairies outside begged for a taste, and they ate so much that the King was afraid he should have to send for the doctor, and told them they must not eat any more.

When the cake was mixed and ready to be baked, the Chief Cook was in a greater dilemma than ever, for in all the Royal kitchen there was not an oven big enough to hold it.

This time, when he went to the King for advice, he was told—

'The cake must be set up in the Royal meadow, and baked by the heat of the sun.'

So the two hundred and fifty cooks were marshalled in processional array, and headed by the Chief Cook (who carried a silver spoon in token of his office), they issued forth towards the Royal meadow, and

built up the cake in the sight of a vast, wondering crowd.

And when the cake was baked, the King himself came out to inspect it, and even he, when he saw it, was astonished, it looked so big and so beautiful.

He sent for his pale green chariot, drawn by six white butterflies, and when it arrived he jumped on board, and told the coachman to drive slowly round the cake, so that he might view it from every side; and when he came back to the starting-point, he alighted from the chariot, and said—

'Send for Jack Frost.'

When the fairies heard this, they put on shawls and muffs and snow-boots, and some of the little fairies who lived near flew home for their skates.

A slight shiver went through the crowd as Jack Frost made his appearance. Some of the baby fairies who had never seen

him before wondered at his long white beard. They thought he was made of glass and wanted to play with him, but when they found how hard he could pinch, they ran back to their mothers to have their little hands kissed.

'Ho! ho!' cried Jack Frost, when he saw the cake, and heard he must cover it all over with ice.

He blew a shrill blast, and in a moment the air was white with snow-maidens, who showered down countless flakes of snow, and piled them up in twists and turrets all round the sides, leaving a smooth white surface in the middle of the cake.

When their work was done, the snow-maidens silently withdrew, and Jack Frost himself vanished as suddenly as he had appeared.

The fairies were glad to lay aside their heavy wraps and flit about in the sunshine

once more, and when it was quite warm, the King came out a second time to view the cake.

And when he saw it he said—

'Send for the three oldest gardeners.'

When the three oldest gardeners arrived, they were told to bring all the pink flowers they could possibly gather; and presently they returned laden with sweet-peas, and poppies, and pinks, and pæonies, and may, and daphne, and all the pink flowers that ever grew; and when these were laid down before the King, he said—

'Send for the three cleverest artists.'

When the artists appeared, they were told to invent the most beautiful paint that had ever been seen, out of all the flowers. So they made the paint and brought it to the King, and when he saw it he said—

'Send for the three wisest schoolmasters.'

Very slowly the schoolmasters made their way through the crowd; for they were very learned, and were each followed by a little fairy who pushed a wheelbarrow full of books.

And when they stood before the King he said—

'Search in your wisest books for the name I want.'

So they searched for three whole days, and at the end of the third day they said: 'Ronald is the name.'

When the King heard that, he told the artists to write RONALD in the very middle of the cake with the wonderful pink paint, and when this had been done, it looked so very beautiful that all the fairies clapped their hands and danced round.

They wondered very much what was going to happen next, for the King sent for seven little candles, and ordered them




THEY PULLED WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT TILL THE CAKE DID ACTUALLY BEGIN TO MOVE

to be placed on the cake. Then, with his own Royal wand, he touched them lightly one after the other, and each in turn gave out a clear bright flame, most beautiful to behold.

And then he sat in state on his golden throne, and told the fairies why the cake had been made in this marvellous way.

'It is for the earth,' he said.

The fairies wondered how it would ever reach the earth, for it was so big and heavy that no one was strong enough to move it.

At a word from the King, however, they took hands in a long, live chain, and surrounded the cake, and they pulled, and tugged, and strained with all their might till the cake did actually begin to move a little bit forward.

How they puffed, and panted, and struggled to push it nearer, nearer, ever a little nearer the edge, till at last—

Plump!—over it went, and the fairies had done their part.

II

It looked like a party to the little rich girl outside.

She watched eagerly from the carriage window, a little puzzled. It was all so interesting; and yet the boys wore every-day clothes, mended in places, and not one of the little girls was in white.

Maud wondered how she could ever have thought Wellington Place a dreary street.

Her mother had often laughed when Maud had complained of the dulness of visiting the dressmaker, and she had said, 'Some day you will come under the charm of Wellington Place,' and now her mother's prediction had come true.

She had watched the arrival of the little cloaked figures; had seen them admitted

by Sarah, whose apron was starched till it was stiff as a board; had followed them mentally up the narrow staircase and into the little drawing-room, where the lights were burning.

Down below, all was dark at first, but when Parker drew up the carriage, after a short journey up the street and back again, the little maid was entering the room, a lighted taper in her hand—a magic wand, rather, it seemed to Maud, revealing the mysteries of the little household.

One, two, three, four, five! All the gases were burning now, and the room was in a blaze of light.

It was a shabby, poorly furnished, almost dingy little room. Maud scarcely noticed this, however, for immediately her eyes fell on the table, in the centre of which stood a cake, a birthday cake, *the* birthday cake (if she had only known it!)

which had been made and fashioned in Fairyland.

Such a cake as even Maud had never seen, for the delicate tracery and dainty little lines could only have been executed by fairy hands.

And then the candles!

'Seven candles,' said Maud to herself, 'the birthday-child must be seven years old. I wonder if it is a boy or a girl? And oh! I hope they won't pull down the blinds.'

No! Sarah has too many things to think of; for there is the fire to mend, and when all is ready, the teapot must be fetched, and a great steaming jug of something hot.

Maud wondered what was in it.

'Chocolate,' she decided, 'all sugared and creamed like the chocolate we had in Paris.'

And then Sarah walked slowly round

the table, putting final touches here and there.

'No crackers?' thought Maud. 'What a funny party!'

She had little time for surmisings, however, for in a minute a scamper of feet could be heard, and eager, high-pitched voices, and then a pause, and a sudden hush as the door opened.

'O mother!' cried Ronald, and before all the children, he flung his arms round his mother's neck, and Maud knew he must be the birthday-child.

'How lovely!' cried the children, and Maud joined in their cry, for the cake sparkled and glistened in the light of the seven candles.

She knelt on the cushions and pressed her face against the window-pane, and in her mind she joined the little party—an invisible guest.

'I shall have to sit in the armchair by the fire,' she thought. 'There are only just enough chairs to go round. Oh, what a darling little child! That seat is far too low for her. I wonder what they will do?'

The carriage made another excursion up the street and down again, and on its return Maud noticed with approval that an imposing throne of cushions had been erected for little Rose.

From this point of vantage Rose spied a plate of buns shaped like rabbits, with large, staring, currant eyes. All her baby manners were forgotten in an intense desire to possess one, and stretching out her hands with a quick movement that upset her balance in a moment, Rose and the buns and the cushions were lying in a little heap on the floor.

Rose began to cry, for the rabbits were crushed and spoilt by the fall, and she was

sorry, oh, so sorry, that she had been naughty, and rude, and greedy.

Her tears did not stop until she had been taken up on Ronald's mother's knee, and allowed to drop lumps of sugar into everybody's cup; and when the poor crushed rabbits were handed round, Rose hid her face behind the tea-cosy, and longed for the time to arrive when the cake should have to be cut.

Ronald was to do this himself; but when the time came, and the beautiful cake was drawn to the edge of the table, Ronald was so terribly afraid of spoiling it, that he begged his mother to guide his little trembling hand with her own firm, strong one.

After the first cut had been made, Ronald's mother cut seven even slices, and on each piece there burned a little candle, and when all the guests had received a

slice, there were just two pieces left, one for Ronald and one for his mother.

And Maud in the carriage outside felt an intense longing to be in the cosy room in reality.

She pretended with all her might that Ronald had offered her a slice of cake, and that she had refused it, but she could scarcely keep the tears out of her eyes as she said to herself—

'I wouldn't have taken it, but oh, I wish he had *really* offered me the tiniest piece!'

And indoors, the little party went on, all unconscious of the longing child outside.

Once more busy feet mounted the stairs, and voices were heard in the drawing-room.

And then came music—music which stopped abruptly, and the sudden scramble

for chairs told Maud all about the game, and she listened for the thrilling pause as breathlessly as any of the children who played.

Other games followed, games which Maud could not make out; and she began to feel a little dull, and a little cold, and to wonder why dressmakers always kept people for such long, long hours, and why anybody who was grown-up ever had a dress fitted at all. And while Maud waited, and thought how late it must be growing, a clock struck six, and the party began to break up.

Maud was interested once more, for the summoning bell brought Sarah to the door, and as it was thrown open, flooding the steps with light, Maud had a glimpse of the hall, hung with holly; and of the staircase, which looked ordinary enough, but which led—she knew—right

up into an enchanted land of games and gladness.

As the little guests came down the steps, Maud lowered the carriage window, for she longed to identify herself with them as much as possible.

How sorry they must be, she thought, that the party was at an end, and yet . . . and yet . . . they had *been* the party, and had they not each, in remembrance, a little candle to carry home?

The children as they passed gazed at the rich child in the carriage, wondering at her eager, wistful face.

And then the Birthday-Child stood in the doorway, alone at last.

In his hand he held a candle, still burning, Maud noticed, with a curious, soft, sparkling light, and the light fell full on her face, dazzling her with its brilliance.

She put up her hand with a sudden

cry, and as she did so, it seemed to her that the Birthday-Child had left the steps, and was coming towards her, holding out the candle for her to take.

In another moment he was gone.

'Oh,' thought Maud, 'is it real, or only a dream?'

She looked at her hands, wondering, and with a thrill of joy she saw that they held the candle, still burning with a clear, steady flame.

'Then it *is* real,' she said to herself, with a sigh.

And then the carriage moved forward with a jerk, and Maud heard her mother's voice—

'Home, Parker.'

Maud pulled up the rug, and her mother entered the carriage.

She did not seem to notice the candle, and patted Maud's hands laughing.

'Poor little Maud! Why, it is six o'clock! Did the time pass very slowly?'

And Maud, looking at the candle which burned still with tender, tremulous light, answered softly—

'Oh no, mamma, I wasn't dull at all.'

# Daisy Chains

'PLEASE, Mamzee, are you *very* busy, or may we come through?'

'Oh, come,' I answered smiling, as the two little sun-bonneted figures scrambled through the gap in the hedge. 'I am never too busy to see my friends.'

'Are you never, *never* too busy?' Vera asked gravely, as she held out her hand.

'Never too busy to *see* them,' I repeated. 'Sometimes I am too busy to talk to them,' I added.

'Do you hear that, Bee? Never too busy to see them.'

And Bee, holding out her hand (the left one), answered—

'Yiss.'

'The hedge is very prickly to-day, Mamzee.'

'Did you hurt yourself, Vera?'

'No, I didn't hurt myself, but I tickled myself, and so did Bee. Didn't you, Bee?'

'Yiss, I did,' she assented.

'And some sticks got into my hair and into Bee's hair.'

'Do you know what Gardener said to me this morning, Vera? He said, "Please, ma'am, there is a gap in the hedge. It looks as if a hare might get through, and hares are very destructive animals, ma'am. Shall I put up some wire-netting, if you please, ma'am?"'

'Do you hear that, Bee? And what did you say to Gardener?' Vera asked, in some anxiety.

'I told him that he need not stop the gap just at present.'

'Oh, did you?' cried Vera, greatly relieved. 'And what did Gardener say then?'

'He said, "Very good, ma'am."'

'And what did you say after that, Mamzee?'

'Then I said to myself, "I wonder what my little friends would have said if they had found the gap all filled up with wire-netting?"'

'What would we have said?'

'Ah, I don't know,' I answered, laughing. 'I expect you would have said, "Dear me, what is the meaning of this?" or something like that.'

'I expect we would. We might have said, "I wonder if Gardener has put up the netting to keep out the hares?" Don't you think we might, Mamzee?'

'Possibly,' I said; 'but you might not have thought of the hares.'

'Perhaps not. Do you think we would have thought of the hares, Bee?'

'Yiss,' was the unhesitating answer.

'What would the hares do, Mamzee, if they came through?'

'They would scamper all over my nice, tidy beds, and nibble the flowers.'

'Wouldn't Gardener chase them away?'

'They would come at night, after Gardener had gone home, and no one would see them taking my flowers.'

'Wouldn't they leave any?'

'Oh yes. They would not be able to nibble them all in one night; but they would come, night after night, and spoil a few more each time they came.'

'If they nibbled *all* the flowers, we couldn't make daisy chains. Could we, Mamzee?'

'Not if they nibbled the daisies.'

'Had we better make daisy chains to-day?'

'Yes, do,' I said. 'You will find some beautiful long-stalked daisies beside the lilac-bush, and while you are picking them, I will fetch my work.'

The children scampered off at once to secure the daisies, gathering them into a little heap in their overalls; and presently they returned in great glee, displaying their treasures.

'We picked every long-stalked daisy, and all the pinky ones as well, and we are going to make a great long chain as long as the world,' Vera announced.

'Yiss,' echoed Bee.

'Then you must set to work immediately,' I told them, 'because it takes a long time to make a chain.'

'Yes, it does,' Vera agreed; 'and if we

haven't finished by tea-time, we shall have to make more daisy chains after tea until it is finished, or until bed-time.'

In unusual silence my little friends set to work, and I wondered how long their voices would be still. At length, however, my thoughts were interrupted by Bee, who held up her chain for inspection.

'O Bee!' cried Vera reprovingly, 'you have threaded all the daisies into one daisy.'

'Yiss,' said Bee, in a tone of great satisfaction.

'But you shouldn't. Should she, Mamzee?'

'Not for a chain. But suppose we make it into a tassel to hang at the end of the chain?' was my suggestion.

'Could we?' Vera asked doubtfully. She had never seen a daisy chain with a tassel at the end.

'Yes, of course we could. Such a wonderful chain as this must be different from every other in the world.'

'So it must. It must be different from every other chain in the world,' Vera repeated.

She held up her own chain, and I measured it with my measuring-tape.

'How long is it, Mamzee?'

'One yard and three inches,' I answered, 'and now I think you should both trot off for more daisies. You have been sitting still for a long time.'

The children came back full of new ideas.

'We are not going to make it as long as the world,' Vera explained, 'but we are going to make it the most wonderful chain, with tassels and dandelions and clover; and when it is finished we are going to give it to mother. And we will

make one for you too, Mamzee, only not quite such a nice one, because there wouldn't be time, would there?'

'Not if they are to be ready by tea-time.'

'And please, Mamzee, won't you tell us a story?'

'Yiss,' urged Bee, settling herself down in a little bunch on the ground.

'What sort of a story?' I asked, for I had told them all the fairy tales I knew.

'A story about a garden,' said Vera, looking round, 'and about a little girl, and about a daisy chain.'

'But I do not know any stories about daisy chains or even about gardens—not any new ones, at least.'

'Oh yes, please, Mamzee. You can invent one. We would like an invented one, wouldn't we, Bee?'

'Yiss.'

'Well,' if you are very quiet for a few minutes I will see what can be done about a story, but it may not be a very interesting one.'

'Will you tell us when it is ready?'

'Yes, but you must be quiet now.'

In a short time I was able to announce that the story was ready.

'Is it about a daisy chain?'

'Yes,' I said, 'but you must not ask too many questions, or the story will never be told.'

'How many questions may we ask?'

'Oh, just one now and again.'

'Do you hear that, Bee? We are not to ask too many questions; just now and again.'

'Yiss.'

I began—

'Once upon a time there lived a little girl——'

'Was she a Princess?' Vera interrupted.

'No, just an ordinary little girl. And she was taken into a garden full of all kinds of beautiful flowers.'

'Was it a big garden?'

'Yes.'

'As big as this garden?'

'It was bigger.'

'Bigger than our garden?'

'Yes, bigger than any garden you have ever seen.'

Vera gave a sigh of satisfaction.

'All around her were flowers of every colour—roses and honeysuckle, and Canterbury bells and mignonette, and sweet-peas and forget-me-nots, and poppies.'

'Shirley poppies?'

'Yes; and Iceland poppies, and pæonies, and pansies, and asters.'

'Was there heliotrope?'

'Yes, and heliotrope. The little girl thought she had never seen such a beautiful garden in her life, and she was very happy at first. She trotted round all the walks from one bed of flowers to another, and when she was tired she sat down on the grass, and then she was told she might make a daisy chain.'

'Did she want to?'

'Yes, she wanted to make one very much, for some of the daisies had such beautiful pink tips. She soon began to pull them and string them together, and she felt very proud of her chain.

'But after a time she said to herself, "I am tired of making nothing but a daisy chain, daisies are such homely flowers," and she began to look about her at the other flowers, and she wished she might have some of them to play with.'

'And might she?'

'No, she was only allowed to play with the daisies.'

'I hope she did not take any of the other flowers?' Vera's voice was very grave.

'After a time,' I went on, 'she thought to herself, "I wonder if it would matter if I took just one rose for my chain? It would look so lovely."

'Over her head grew a rose-bush with crimson flowers. There was one dear little flower, half-bud, half-rose, and she set her heart on having this one for her chain. It was just beyond her reach, but by standing on tiptoe she managed to catch the spray on which it grew, and in another minute the rose lay on the grass at her feet.

'Then the little girl took up the rose and tried to work it into her chain, but it was very difficult, as the daisy stalks were so

short. The thorns, too, pricked her fingers, and in trying to break them off she loosened some of the petals, and they fell in a crimson shower at her side. She was very sorry now that she had taken the rose, and she cried bitterly when she saw how it had been spoilt by her want of care.

'She worked at the chain in silence till a good deal was done, and then she held it up to see how long it had grown; but, alas! the weight of the rose was too great for the little flowers, and the chain broke.

'Then the little girl cried again.

'She took out the rose and pieced the chain together as well as she could, but five or six little daisies had to be thrown away because their stalks were torn.

'Oh, how she wished that she had never pulled the rose!

'The hot sun beat down upon it as it lay on the grass at her feet, and still the little girl worked at the chain. At last it was finished, but not until the sun had set and the first stars were come out in the evening sky.

'And as the night fell upon the garden, hiding all its beautiful flowers in the darkness, the little girl took up the chain very carefully in both hands, for she knew it was time to go home.

'And lo! all the little homely daisies had turned into shining stars of light.'

As the story ended, the children sprang to their feet with a quick cry of joy, and scattering clover and dandelions and daisies in their haste, they rushed forward with the half-finished chain.

As I followed more slowly, stepping over a carpet of tiny flowers, I could see their

mother, a prisoner in the hands of the little ones, while down the path came the sound of Vera's voice—

'And lo! all the daisies were turned into beautiful shining stars.'

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

It was at breakfast on Thursday that father told us the joyful news.

Uncle Trevor coming next week! And only three whole days to prepare for him; for lesson days do not count, there is so little time for anything.

How Barbara and I envied the boys because their holidays began on Wednesday! Miss Errol always likes us to finish up everything, weeks and all, to the very end. Even our exercise-books have to be finished to the last line.

I should like to keep the last line for a flourish, but Miss Errol makes me crowd the flourish into the space below.

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

We always make our writing as large as possible on the last day of lessons, so that we may begin the next term with a new book.

'Thursday, Friday, Saturday: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday,' we kept saying over and over again all through the day.

Reggie made us each a set of tickets, and we tore off one every morning. Jack scored out each day as it passed on his calendar as well, but as our calendar has pictures on it, Barbara and I did not like to spoil it.

The minute breakfast was over we rushed out to our gardens and began to weed. We certainly had let them get weedy lately, the boys' especially. Barbara's was the neatest. She is such a methodical little person, and then she has so much more time than I have, but even her garden was pretty untidy.

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

The boys promised to feed the rabbits, and we all worked hard till it was time to go in for lessons.

Miss Errol had met father on her way to the house, so when we asked, 'Who do you think is coming next week?' she guessed at once.

We talked over all sorts of projects till the clock struck, and then came hour after hour of sums and French verbs and history.

Barbara was free at eleven.

Jack was waiting for her outside, and I could hear them talking.

'Hurry up, Barbara! We can't find the watering-can. Where is it?'

I couldn't hear Barbara's answer, but evidently she did not know, for presently I heard Jack's voice.

'O bother! When is Hilda coming? Not till twelve? But we can't wait till twelve. What is she doing?'

'The Wars of the Roses when I came out.'

And then Reggie came up, and Jack called out—

'I say, Reggie, Barbara doesn't know, and Hilda is doing the Wars of the Roses, and won't be out for an hour. What shall we do?'

'Go on with the Wars of the Roses.'

'What do you mean?'

'In our gardens, of course. The war between weeds and roses.'

He laughed, and the others laughed too, and I am sure Miss Errol smiled.

It is always Reggie who thinks of things and invents them.

He invented the Fat Goblin two years ago. The Fat Goblin is very round and fat and funny, and no one can think of him without laughing. He is so fat that he cannot walk, but always rolls about.

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

He can appear whenever you like, only you must laugh when he is summoned, or it is no good.

It is a splendid plan, as whenever we begin to be cross, we have only to say, 'The Fat Goblin!' and then we all burst out laughing.

We do not use him too often, for fear of breaking the spell.

He was such a success that we begged Reggie to invent something to make us keep from laughing at times when we have to be solemn.

We tried all sorts of things, but none of them were of much use.

At last Reggie invented a very long, lean man with dark, lank hair, who always sits with his hands crossed in front of him.

We had him for about six weeks, and thought he was going to work beautifully, but one unfortunate day spoilt it all.

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

A Mr. Morden came to see father about one of the farms, and father asked him to stay for luncheon.

As soon as we saw him, we all looked at each other, and had to turn away to hide our laughter, for Mr. Morden was exactly like the Lean Man.

We simply shook with laughter when he sat down, for we noticed that he crossed his hands in front of him.

Happily for me there was a large vase of fluffy flowers in front of my place, and I was able to look at my plate all the time.

Reggie was sitting opposite Jack, and he put on a melancholy expression and crossed his hands on purpose to make Jack laugh.

Every time father made a remark, Mr. Morden would say, 'Quite so, quite so,' even when it wasn't so at all, and poor Jack didn't know what to do, and at last he

laughed out quite loud, and had to be sent out of the room.

We gave up having the Lean Man after that.

I thought twelve o'clock would never arrive, but it did come at last. I only took about a moment and a half to put away the books and tidy the schoolroom, and then we were free.

We met Jack, who was very grubby and untidy. He was wildly excited, as he had just been up his tallest tree, and he certainly looked as if he had been climbing.

He loves them, and grows nothing but trees in his garden. None of them are very big yet, but I don't know what his garden will be like in a few years, as he is always planting new ones.

'My dear Jack, what have you been doing?' Miss Errol asked, he was so very

messy; 'you look as if you had been out in the rain.'

'Well, you see, we found the watering-can, and then I climbed the Monarch, and it looked so jolly up there, I thought I would water my garden from the top. We got two cans safely up, and then I tried to send the water a little further and lost my balance and came down. I very nearly fell on the rake, and as it is, the spout of the can is a good deal bent. I am sorry, Hilda, it looks such a crock, but it hasn't done much harm. The water spurts out in jerks, but if you hold it a little to one side, it flows pretty evenly.'

It did look rather a crock, and the boys had knocked off a good deal of the paint in trying to hammer it into shape with stones.

One of the Monarch's branches was broken. It really was silly of Jack to climb it, as it is not nearly strong enough

to bear him, and sways from side to side when he is on it.

We held a consultation over the gardens, and came to the conclusion that it would be a good plan for all of us to work at the same garden till it was finished, and then go on to the next.

We began with Barbara's, as she is the youngest, and besides she is such a dear little creature, and is always doing other people's work. She is just sweet about running messages whenever we want anything done, and never gets cross or put out.

Suddenly a brilliant idea came into Reggie's mind. We all stopped working to hear what it was.

You can always tell when he has invented something, as he stops quite short in the middle of whatever he is doing and lets the idea come out.

Sometimes he is in the middle of talking about quite a different subject, and as soon as he has told his invention he goes back and finishes his sentence.

I had said to him rather crossly, 'Do take care, Reggie; you are just going to stand on my pinks.'

He was raking the path, and not looking where he was going.

'I am . . . Hilda! suppose you make a Union Jack on the dinner-table the night Uncle Trevor comes . . . taking care.'

'What a splendid idea!' we all cried. 'How shall we do it?'

Miss Errol suggested ribbons.

I flew into the house to see what we had.

There were several new pieces of white hair-ribbon and two of blue. My others were all brown. Barbara doesn't have her hair tied, so I couldn't get any from her.

'It is a pity, Barbara,' I said, 'that you wear your hair loose.'

'Yes, it is a pity,' she agreed.

'What about your dolls' sashes, Barbara?' Miss Errol asked.

This time it was Barbara who flew into the house.

'I'm afraid they will be too crumpled, Miss Errol; she is always tying their sashes,' I said.

'An iron would put that right.'

'Yes, but she always washes and irons her dolls' things herself, and she *always* scorches them. They look horrid.'

'Surely we made an expedition to Blount's some time ago to buy a new sash for Beatrice?'

'Yes; but don't you remember it was just before the boat-race, and we decided to get it pale blue so that it would come in for badges?'

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

Barbara appeared with her hands full of ribbons, but none of them looked fresh.

'I only brought the right colours,' she said, 'all the reds and blues I could find. I'm afraid they are very crumpled.'

'What do you think, Reggie? Will they do?'

'No, they look horrid. But I'll tell you what! Make it of flowers. Corn-flowers and geraniums and some sort of white flower—there are heaps of them in the garden.'

'Brilliant, Reggie! and we can use the red candle-shades. The only thing is——'

'Oh, never mind! I know what you are going to say, and it is quite worth it.'

'What was I going to say?'

'That you'll have to do the flowers the whole of the holidays. You do make a fuss about them—"I've got to do the flowers"—whenever you're wanted.'

'It's all very well to talk, but if you had to do them you would realise what it means. It takes up heaps of time.'

'And don't you think yourself grown-up,' Reggie went on, 'and give yourself airs? "I've got to do the flowers, children, so run away till I'm ready"—I never saw anything like it!'

I began to be really angry, because it does take up a lot of my time, and I was just going to say that I wouldn't do the Union Jack at all, when the others called out—

'The Fat Goblin! Quick, Hilda, the Fat Goblin!'

I didn't want to laugh, but we have all promised to do so, and I had to, and so had Reggie.

Father always asks me at the beginning of the holidays, if I should like to take charge of the flowers. I don't need

to do them unless I like, but if I say 'yes,' I have to arrange them every day till the holidays are over, without missing once. I like doing them, though sometimes they are a great bother.

'Now, Hilda, do be sensible and don't mind what Reggie says. You will do it, won't you?' Jack coaxed me.

'Very well,' I said, 'only next time I am busy with the flowers and you want me to do something else, you must remember that I am doing them because you asked me, and not poke at me till I get angry.'

'Oh, all right, Hilda, no harm done,' said Reggie; 'but look here, do you know how to make a Union Jack? It's not as easy as it looks.'

'Of course I do. I know all about it, and why the white comes out more to one side.'

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'Of course I do. I know all about it, and why the white comes out more to one side.'

'Who told you?'

'Uncle Trevor told me first, and then I looked it up in the encyclopædia. Girls do know some things, and when they don't, they read books till they find out.'

'I rather think some of you had better send for the Fat Goblin,' said Miss Errol. 'He does not seem to have stayed quite long enough.'

However, the first bell rang then, and it was time to go in to get ready for luncheon.

After our music-lessons in the afternoon, we had to go to Brierly to carry a message from father to Mr. Barton.

It takes nearly an hour to walk to Brierly by our favourite road, crossing the railway at the level crossing.

When we got to Brierly, Mrs. Barton came to the door and told us not to come in, as one of the children had measles.

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

We were all rather disappointed, as we generally get a very good tea at Brierly. However, Mrs. Barton said we were to go into the garden and have strawberries before going home.

Their strawberries are much bigger than ours, and it is nice to be allowed to eat as many as we like; but Miss Errol would only let us stay for ten minutes, and then we had to start for home.

Reggie was so quiet, I thought at first he must have had too many strawberries, but he kept smiling to himself, and I thought he wouldn't be smiling if that were the case.

He hardly spoke a word till we had crossed the line, and then he told us he had been making up poetry.

Of course we expected it would be poetry about Uncle Trevor, but he said it wasn't about Uncle Trevor at all, only he felt

so jolly all round that he had to make it up.

'Well, tell us what it is?' we asked.

'I think I shall call it "Wishes," and there are two verses.'

'Oh, never mind its name. Tell us the verses.'

'Well,' he said—

'I wish I were a furze-bush pod
  A-popping in the sun,
The passers-by would hear me crack,
  And stop to see the fun.

I wish I were a railway-train
  Puffing with all my might:
I'd rush past fields of cows and sheep
  And give them all a fright.

'I tried to do a lot more, but none of the other things would rhyme properly. I tried to do a squirt, and a soda-water bottle bursting, and a window being smashed, but I couldn't work them in.'

'O Miss Errol, couldn't we play the

poetry game? Suppose we each do a verse about squirts or windows or soda-water bottles? They needn't fit in with Reggie's, need they, and Barbara might choose her own subject?'

'How shall we allot the words, Hilda?'

'Oh, you will take the most difficult, won't you, please, Miss Errol? I'm sure none of us could do the soda-water bottle, could we, Jack?'

'No, I'm sure we couldn't; but I think I could do the squirt.'

'All right; and I'll do the window-smashing.' And we all set to work to make poetry.

Miss Errol was ready first, though hers was by far the most difficult word—

'A soda-water bottle
Was fastened down with wire,
A thirsty man upset it
And filled it full of ire.

Now when the man attempted
  To quench his burning thirst,
The soda-water gave a gasp,
  And then—the bottle burst.'

'Splendid!' we all said.

'Now, Hilda.'

'My poetry has a moral,' I remarked :—

'A window looked very tempting indeed,
To a naughty boy who passed at full speed;
He picked up a stone and aimed at the sash,
And a pane of glass came down with a crash.
But just as the boy was passing the smash,
A bit of glass fell and gave him a gash.
The naughty boy howled, for the cut made him
  bleed,
And he fled from the fatal place at full speed.'

'Where is the moral?' they asked.

'The moral is, don't break windows,' I answered severely, for Reggie had told me how the boys at school break the windows for fun.

'Oh, all right, we see. Now, Jack, it's your turn.'

'I couldn't get mine to come quite right,' he said meekly:—

'Listen to the tale of a squirt,
The squirt was very pert,
It spattered water over my shirt,
And I had to wash out the dirt.'

'Why, it doesn't scan properly,' Reggie cried. 'It's like the thing in music—you know, Hilda—when the top notes come tumbling out quicker than the underneath ones.'

I didn't know a bit, but I murmured something about *grace-notes.*

'Oh no! not grace-notes. What do you call those things with tails, when so many notes of the one make up fewer of the other?'

I pretended not to hear, because I always get mixed with the notes in music, so he asked Miss Errol.

'Yes—quavers—that's what I mean.

Two quavers are equal to one crotchet. Well, look here, Jack, take one word like *Hark* instead of *Listen*, and you will find it sounds twice as well.

'"Hark to the song of a squirt," that makes it all right, you see.'

'It wasn't "the song," it was "the tale,"' Jack objected.

'Oh, all right. It comes to much the same thing in the end. Now, Barbara, for your poem.'

'Mine's about strawberries:—

'I ate so many strawberries to-day,
That is all I can say.'

'You greedy little thing!'

'I didn't really,' Barbara explained, 'only that was the only poetry I could make. I could have eaten far more strawberries.'

'All the more room for tea, then. Martin won't expect us for tea, will she, Miss Errol?'

'With Martin, the unexpected often takes place.'

'Yes. Do you remember the time she went to London, and we gave her a packet that she thought was sandwiches, and it was really a frog? That was rather unexpected, I think.'

'Yes, and she wouldn't tell father for fear he would laugh.'

'Yes, but don't you remember how she paid us out and put no tea in the tea-pot for a week, and we pretended not to notice?'

'My dear children,' said Miss Errol, 'do you always get into mischief in the holidays?'

'Always,' we said.

'Then I think I had better come for an hour or two every day during the holidays, to keep you in order.'

'Oh, I wish you would!' we all cried,

for Miss Errol is a dear, and we have far nicer games when she is with us. If only she would not make us work so hard at lesson-times, we should love to have her always, but she is dreadfully strict at lessons.

Some one suggested that as it was so late, we should get Eliza to give us tea in the nursery. She always likes making it for us.

Eliza was our mother's nurse long ago, and Uncle Trevor's, and she *was* delighted when she heard he was coming.

He always goes to the nursery and tells her what he has been doing, when he comes to stay, and she tells us stories of what they used to do when they were little.

Sometimes they used to be quite naughty.

The fire was very low when we went

in, and the kettle took a long time to boil. We did all we could to make tea last as long as possible, for Barbara and I didn't want to practise, and we never have to work after half-past six.

Then came Friday, and Friday's lessons. Friday is always a horrid day, as we seem to have all the worst subjects then, and very often we get bad marks.

This Friday was pretty bad. It was so hard to do geography and grammar when the boys were having all sorts of fun outside.

I had three bad marks, and Barbara cried at arithmetic, as she couldn't get the answers to come right.

When Miss Errol saw that Barbara had cried so much that half the figures in her sums were washed out, she made Barbara bring the slate to her and they cleaned it. Then Miss Errol drew a picture of

the Fat Goblin on the slate, and told Barbara to show it to me.

I had never seen him drawn before, and he looked so fat and jolly that I laughed, and Barbara and Miss Errol laughed too.

I had reached the last page of my grammar book, and though I wrote the last sentences of my exercise as large as I possibly could, more than half the page was blank when I had finished, so Miss Errol told Barbara she might do her sums there, and Barbara was so proud of working on paper, that her answers came right quite soon, and of course I was very glad to get my book finished.

When half-past six came we could hardly keep still.

The end of lessons is just lovely, nicer even than the holidays, but we hate saying good-bye to Miss Errol.

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

'Come to see us soon, Miss Errol,' we all begged, and we accompanied her to the end of the drive, and waved our hands till we could see her no more.

When we got back to the house, we could not quite make up our minds what to do first, but Reggie said we ought to finish our gardens before doing anything else, and we worked pretty hard and got them nearly done.

On Saturday we did a lot of odd work. The butterfly-net had a large hole in it, and I patched it with muslin and then painted it green.

Jack's fishing-rod had to be glued, too, as it had been broken in the Easter holidays and left in pieces.

We also had to nail up some netting on the rabbit-hutch, and did quite a lot of arrears, as we always like to have everything in order when Uncle Trevor comes.

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

Everything was more or less in order by Saturday night, and we had the whole of Monday and Tuesday to prepare for him.

The boys made flags and stuck them on sticks in the front windows. Reggie was too busy with the flags to think of anything for us to do, but when the flags were hung up we got the boys to come and consult, and we found that Reggie was full of ideas.

First he thought of fireworks, but we hadn't enough money to buy any, and besides we are not allowed to go to the village alone, and then Uncle Trevor was to arrive in daylight.

Then we thought of making a triumphal arch, but Peter would not let us have enough evergreens to make a good one, and a scraggy arch is horrid.

Then Reggie thought of hollyhocks—

each of us to have a hollyhock as a musket, and salute Uncle Trevor as he drove up. He made us drill with sticks till we knew what to do, but when we asked Peter if we might have four hollyhocks, he grumbled dreadfully and wouldn't let us have them.

I was very angry, as he might easily have spared us one each and not have spoilt the row, but I dared not worry him too much, as I knew I should have to ask for a lot of flowers for the Union Jack.

We were all as disgusted as could be, and did not know what to do about it, but Barbara suggested—

'Let's ask father. I am sure he will let us have them.'

'You ask him, Barbara,' we said, 'but don't tell him what we want them for.'

Barbara made us promise to come with

her, and we all went together to look for father.

He was talking to Peter, and we had to wait for ages before he was done.

At last he left the garden, and we went to meet him.

'Now, Barbara,' we said, and pushed her forward.

'Please, father, we want to ask you something very particular.'

'Well, little woman, what is it?'

'Please, father, we want some hollyhocks, just one each. May we have them?'

'Why don't you ask Peter?'

'We have asked him, but he won't let us have them. We really do want them dreadfully.'

'But if I say "Yes" when Peter has said "No," you will get me into his black books!'

'O father, you know you are never in Peter's black books. He always lets us do anything when we tell him you have given us permission. He just says, "If master says 'Yes' I says nought," doesn't he, Hilda?'

'Yes, father, he really does. Don't you remember that time you said I might keep my scented geranium in the green-house? He said: "If master says yes, I says nought," and he made room for it quite easily, although he had told me before that he needed every inch of space for his own things. He really won't mind if you say "Yes."'

'What on earth are you going to do with hollyhocks? Fasten them together and make a bean-stalk for Jack to climb? He is too solid, I fear, and would come tumbling down.'

'Oh no, father, it isn't for that, but

we don't want any one to know, so please do not ask. We may have them, mayn't we?'

And then father said 'Yes,' and we rushed off to choose them.

Mine was dark red—such a beauty! Barbara chose a pale pink one, it had so many flowers.

Reggie's was yellow, as he said it would look like a golden sceptre.

Jack chose an ugly one with browny flowers, but it was the tallest, and that was why he liked it.

We didn't pick them until the next day, as we wanted them to be as fresh as possible.

After tea that night, Martin told Reggie that father wanted to speak to him in the library.

We couldn't think of anything he had done, and were afraid that father had changed his mind about the hollyhocks.

# When Uncle Trevor Comes

We waited on the stair to catch Reggie the minute he came out of the library, and he had such a queer look on his face that we were afraid something dreadful must have happened.

'What is it, Reggie? What have you done? Tell us quick.'

'It's the flags,' he said. 'Father saw them when he came in this evening.'

'Mayn't we have them?' we asked anxiously, for they looked very imposing.

'It isn't that,' he said, 'but we very nearly left them up after sunset. Think how dreadful if Uncle Trevor came to know about it, and of course father would tell him.'

Reggie is going into the Navy, and he is frightfully particular about things like that.

'Father was awfully nice about it. He didn't even ask me if we had forgotten,

but just said, "I expect you will want help with the flags, Reggie. I will come and help you in ten minutes."'

'What did you say?' we asked.

'I just said "Thank you," and came away.'

We got the flags down all right, and father showed us a better way of hanging them, so that we could haul them up or down as we liked.

Tuesday came at last.

It was a joy to pull off the last ticket and feel that the day had really arrived.

We cut our hollyhocks early in the morning, and then practised marching up and down till we were able to move them about without entangling them.

After that we had to get the flowers for the Union Jack.

I worked at it nearly the whole afternoon, as it was very difficult to keep the

lines straight. It looked splendid when it was finished.

It was nearly tea-time before it was done, and after tea Reggie gave us our marching orders.

'Ship hats,' he said.

'Hurrah!' we cried, for they are our favourite hats.

Uncle Trevor had given us the ribbon, each with our own name in gold letters, and always when we see other children wearing sailor hats marked 'Victory' or 'Fearless,' we feel so proud of our own ribbons.

Reggie invented that when we wear our Ship hats we are ships—at least we are sometimes ships and sometimes sailors, and we have all sorts of exciting adventures. One of the most exciting real adventures is for all of us to start from different corners of the lawn with our eyes shut, and go straight on without turning to right or left.

We generally meet in the middle at the same time and have a glorious shipwreck. Sometimes, when we have a lot of parcels to carry, we pretend that our ships are very heavily laden, and the parcels don't seem such a bother then.

When we had all put on our sailor things, father came to the schoolroom and told me to get ready to go with him to the station, as there would be room for me in the carriage.

Of course the others were glad that I should go, but it rather spoilt the march-past, and then there would be one hollyhock too many.

I had only a moment or two to get ready, as the carriage came up immediately, but I called out to Reggie—

'Do think of something for my hollyhock.'

We hadn't time to consult about it, but

as I was running downstairs he called out—

'May I have a pair of your gloves?'

'Yes,' I said, 'if you take my cotton ones. Get Barbara to find them for you.'

Once the boys got hold of my kid gloves, stuffed them with sawdust, and then damped the sawdust to make them swell and see if they would burst.

The gloves were quite spoilt, and they had to buy me a new pair.

I didn't mind much about the gloves, but we had counted on having their money for an air-gun, and couldn't get it after all.

All the way to the station my heart went thump, thump, thump, and I could hardly sit still. I began all at once to grow dreadfully shy, and longed to get out of the carriage and run back to the others.

The train was late, and father and I walked up and down the platform for a long time.

## When Uncle Trevor Comes

Every time we thought the train was coming I clutched hold of father's arm. He teased me about it, as he thought I was afraid of falling off the platform, but it wasn't that a bit.

When the train really did appear, I shut my eyes tight.

When I opened them, Uncle Trevor was coming towards us.

I gave him one great hug, and then we all made our way to the van to look after his luggage.

On the way home he told father about his wounded arm. It was very stiff, and he could scarcely use it.

I wanted to ask him all about it, and how it feels to be wounded, and a heap of other things, but every time I tried to speak about it a little lump would come into my throat, and I couldn't say a word.

It was all right when we spoke of other

things, and he asked me about the rabbits and how the boys liked being at school, and how they were getting on with cricket.

He promised to play with us and give us hints. We were rather keen about cricket at that time.

All the way home I kept wondering what the boys would do with my hollyhock, for I knew Reggie would not let it be wasted.

When we came in sight of the house we saw a regiment of four drawn up on either side of the porch, and as the carriage came up the regiment saluted — at least three of them saluted.

Neither father nor Uncle Trevor could guess who the fourth person was, and at first I could not imagine who it could be, but when I recognised that she was wearing my clothes, it flashed into my mind that they had made a dummy.

It really was very well done. They had dressed up a pillow and given it a head. The arms of my coat had been stuffed with hay, and my gloves filled with sawdust and tied on.

They had propped it up on a chair and tied some stockings stuffed with sawdust to the legs of the chair, and till you came quite close you really did think it was a person.

Reggie told me afterwards that it was a good thing the train had been late, as the dummy was only just ready when the carriage drove up. They had meant to give it hair, but had not had time to fray the rope and paint it brown.

We did have fun that night!

We begged Martin to leave the blinds up a tiny little bit so that we might see how father and Uncle Trevor liked the Union Jack.

It was a great success, she told us afterwards, but as she had to pull down the blinds immediately, we only just saw them come into the room.

Then we all marched round and round the house, playing on combs and drums till we could play no longer.

We stayed up till ever so late, as father and Uncle Trevor came into the garden after dinner, and when Eliza rang the bell for Barbara to go to bed, Uncle Trevor begged that we might stay up half an hour later as it was his first night.

Next morning was a beautiful sunny day.

Breakfast took about twice as long as usual, there was so much to talk about, but at last it was arranged that we should have an all-day fishing excursion.

Father went to the greenhouse to get peaches, and the boys rushed off to collect

baskets and fishing-rods. Barbara took Uncle Trevor to see the rabbits, while I was doing the flowers.

They seemed to take a very long time that morning; and I heard the others collecting on the lawn long before I was ready.

When I looked out of the window, I could not help feeling rather out of it, as they were all talking and laughing, and Jack was showing his fishing-rod to Uncle Trevor. Suddenly I noticed that everything had grown absolutely quiet.

It seemed rather queer, and I was afraid they had started without me, so I looked out of the window to see if they had gone.

What exactly had happened I could never quite make out, but I saw Jack lying in a huddled-up heap on the ground, and the others were moving towards him.

By the time I arrived on the lawn, Jack was in Uncle Trevor's arms. It must have hurt him a good deal, as Jack is pretty heavy, and he was leaning against Uncle Trevor's left arm.

'What has happened?' I cried; 'tell me quick,' but I was so dreadfully afraid that Jack had been killed, that I could not bear to have them tell me.

It seemed like a dream.

Barbara was crying, and Reggie had picked up the fishing-rod, and was winding the reel as if nothing had happened.

Then Uncle Trevor said, 'Jack has had a fall, and we are going to carry him to the drawing-room sofa. Run into the house, Hilda, and open the door.'

I flew into the house, and opened the door wide, and pulled a little table out of the way.

As soon as Jack was laid on the sofa, I

knew he wasn't killed, for he began to explain how it had happened, but he looked so white that Uncle Trevor told him not to talk.

He had caught the end of his fishing-rod on a tree, and had to climb up to disentangle it, and somehow he lost his footing and fell, and the fall had stunned him.

Barbara was told to fetch Eliza, and I was sent for a glass of water for Jack.

I brought two tumblers, as Uncle Trevor looked very white himself, and I thought he would not like to drink out of Jack's glass.

On my way back I met father, who was coming in with the peaches.

He asked if we were ready to start, and then I told him about Jack's accident, and that he was lying on the drawing-room sofa.

Uncle Trevor told father that he thought Jack must have broken a bone in his ankle, or else sprained it very severely, so father

wrote a note to Dr. Brown, and told Reggie he might drive over with it.

Barbara and I felt very miserable, as we had been sent out of the drawing-room as soon as Eliza had come.

There was nothing for us to do, and we walked disconsolately up and down the hall waiting for some one to come and tell us about Jack.

After a long time, Uncle Trevor himself came out, and told us not to be anxious about Jack. He sent us into the garden to get strawberries, and after we had brought them, he sent us for plates and sugar and cream, and we all sat on the stairs and ate them.

Then he told us to bring another basketful for Dr. Brown, and when we came back with them, Dr. Brown had arrived, and was in the drawing-room.

He said that Jack had broken a bone

in his ankle, and would be laid up for several weeks.

Poor Jack! He was very miserable at the thought of spending his holidays in bed. Eliza said he cried, and no wonder.

We were not allowed to see him till the afternoon.

He looked rather red about the eyes, but of course we pretended not to notice, and we told him that Reggie had gone into the woods by himself to invent games that he could play in bed.

'It is a good thing we practised being lame so much,' Barbara remarked, 'and there are plenty of crutches.'

'The worst of them is, though, Barbara, that if you use them much, it hurts under your arms,' I objected.

We often play at being lame, and use croquet mallets for crutches, but they do hurt a good deal.

Then Barbara told Jack that we had practised walking up and down stairs on one foot, and we had found that the best plan was to hold on to the bannisters and hop down, though that was very bad for the paint.

'You will have to leave your boots at the foot of the stairs, and hop up in your stockings,' she said.

And then Uncle Trevor came in, and told us he meant to have tea in Jack's room.

'And you may all sit on the floor and pretend it's a picnic.'

'Then father should come too, as we didn't have a real picnic,' said Barbara, and she rushed off to invite him.

'Tell him he may have a chair,' Uncle Trevor called out.

We could see that Uncle Trevor had invented some delightful plan for Jack, for

he kept hinting that Jack would have a very good time, and that we were not to be too sorry for him.

Jack himself looked so mysterious that Barbara whispered to him—

'Do you know what Uncle Trevor is going to do?'

However, Jack had to admit that he didn't know.

'All the same, it is sure to be something nice,' he said.

After tea, Uncle Trevor said that he wanted to consult me about something.

'I want four broom-handles, Hilda. Can you get me such a thing?'

'Must they be broom-handles?' I asked. 'We have a broken rake, and I know Peter has a lot of old tools. Would their handles do?'

'The very thing,' he said; but when he saw them, he said they were very dirty.

'Couldn't we wash them?'

'They require more than soap and water. The mud will have to be scraped off before they are washed. Has Reggie a good knife?'

'Yes,' I said. 'Don't you remember giving him one before you went away? One of the blades is broken, but the biggest is all right.'

When we had chosen four handles about the same size, Uncle Trevor asked if he might come into the schoolroom.

'Of course you may,' I answered.

'But I may want to carry off some of the furniture, Hilda.'

'Take anything you like,' I said, 'only, I do so dreadfully want to know what the secret is. Won't you tell me, Uncle Trevor? I promise not to tell any one about it.'

'I propose making a field hospital for Jack.'

'A field hospital? How splendid! How will you make it? Will it be like the photographs you sent us?'

'I can't tell what it will be like till I have seen my materials, and that is why I want to examine the schoolroom sofa.'

'It isn't really a sofa,' I told him. 'It is only a settle, and we push it against the wall to make it look like a sofa.'

When Uncle Trevor saw the settle, he said that nothing could be better; it was broad and light and easily moved, and a back would just have been in the way.

He showed me what he meant to do; and that was to fix the poles to the four corners, and stretch a sheet over the top. Another sheet would be wanted to keep off the sun at the side, and he asked me how he was to get them.

'You had better ask Eliza,' I said. 'She would get them for you, I think. I don't believe Martin would give them to Ellen, and I am sure she would not let me have them unless I told her exactly what they were wanted for.'

Eliza even had some trouble in getting the sheets from Martin, but she would not come away without them, and brought them in triumph to the schoolroom.

When we went back to Jack's room, we told the others that they were not to go into the schoolroom on any account, as the secret was there.

'Does Hilda know what it is, Uncle Trevor?'

'Yes, Barbara.'

'O Hilda! Have you promised not to tell?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Is it *very* nice, Hilda?'

'Yes. It's just awfully nice,' I said.

'O Uncle Trevor, do tell us what it is! Is it big?'

'Not as big as this room.'

'What can it be? Is it a game?'

'Is it, Hilda?' Uncle Trevor asked.

'Well,' I said, 'not exactly. At least, not yet; but I *think* Reggie could make it into a game.'

And then Uncle Trevor asked Reggie if he would mind helping with the secret, even although he did not know what it was.

Of course Reggie said he would help, but he made Uncle Trevor promise that if he could guess what the poles were for, he should be told about the whole thing. However, none of his guesses came near a field hospital.

That night, after we had gone to bed, Uncle Trevor and father fastened on the poles, and soon after breakfast the next

morning, I was asked to help with the sheets.

There was nothing to fasten them to at first, but we tied rope all round the top, and I sewed the sheets to the rope. Then the tent was carried on to the lawn, and the others were allowed to see it. It looked so cosy and jolly that we quite envied Jack coming to such a dear little hospital.

Before Jack was told about it, Reggie had invented a game.

We were all to be fighting, and Jack, who was badly wounded, was to be carried out of the thickest of the fight by a gallant officer, himself wounded.

'It will work into a splendid game,' he cried. 'Hilda, didn't you save some of the pulling parts of our last crackers? They will do for musket-shots, and we make a desperate stand just in front of the hospital tent.'

'There are only three,' I said.

'Well, we must make as much noise as we can, and keep the crackers till the very end. One of us should be wounded. I haven't got a handkerchief. Can you lend me one, Barbara? We are not nearly dirty enough to have been fighting all day.'

So Reggie made us take off our hats and unlace our boots, and we smudged our faces and hands with earth, and made ourselves very dirty. Reggie tied Barbara's handkerchief across her forehead.

'Do we look dirty enough, Uncle Trevor?'

'Quite,' he said. 'Tell me when you are ready for Jack.'

'I think we'll do now.'

We didn't expect any one would see us, but while we were getting ready Dr. Brown had come, and he and father carried Jack to the tent between them.

It rather spoilt the bit about Jack being

saved by his wounded officer, but then it brought another person into the game.

Dr. Brown pretended to be anxious about the safety of his patient in a spot where such terrific fighting was going on; but we assured him that no foe should enter the tent save over our lifeless bodies, and that we should sell our lives dearly and defend the wounded till the very last.

Then we pulled the crackers, and gave a yell, and drove the enemy from the field.

We had some glorious games.

Jack got rather tired of having always to be the wounded one, and he was often quite cross about it.

We told him to pretend he was a real soldier; and sometimes, in the evenings, Uncle Trevor used to tell us about the men he had known who had been badly wounded, and how patient they were, day after day, in the hospitals.

And after Uncle Trevor had told us about them, Barbara and I planned that, if we had been lame, we should always have been smiling and thinking about other people's pleasure, even if the pain were very bad, instead of grumbling as Jack did. However, when we said so, Jack called out crossly, 'You shut up!'

We were almost sorry, in a way, when Dr. Brown said Jack need not lie still any longer, for we saw so much of Uncle Trevor all that time.

Jack had gradually been allowed to walk a little every day with a stick.

We had suggested the croquet mallets as crutches, but when Dr. Brown heard about it, he laughed very loud, and said—

'We should have our young friend in bed for a month if we were to allow that.'

Of course Jack didn't like being called a 'young friend,' and we all felt rather

snubbed and foolish, so we didn't make any more suggestions.

Jack's very last night in hospital arrived, and Uncle Trevor had a surprise for us.

He said that as we had all been pretty good (on the whole), he was going to present us each with a medal.

He had four little boxes with him, and out of each box he took a new, shiny half-crown, and gave them to us with a little speech.

Most medals, he said, were meant to be kept as a memorial, but these were different, and were to be disposed of at the very first opportunity.

We didn't know how to thank him enough, as we had been very hard up, so we gave a wild 'three cheers.'

Then we sat round the tent and talked of what we should do the next day.

Uncle Trevor said that he thought the

interrupted fishing expedition should be resumed.

'There is one thing I should like to do before even that, Uncle Trevor.'

'What is it?' we asked.

'Climb the tree that threw me,' Jack said.

And he did.

# The Proud Lady

The country is the country all the world over; but the country in holiday-time—in summer holiday-time—is a place, a time, a state of blissful enchantment.

Even the bare, self-conscious house, perched on the steep hillside, is enveloped in a softening haze of mystery by the shade of the one tall tree that stands sentinel on the right.

'House o' the Hill' it is called by the villagers, though its real name is Hampden Villa, and 'House o' the Hill' is adopted by the Halkett children as they rush in, one after the other, to take possession of their summer quarters.

'Mother, mother! Where is she, Di? Look out of the window. I want to know where we are all to go.'

'Where is Muriel? She knows. Mother told her before.'

Lance and Diana dart out of the room in search of Muriel or mother, or any one who can tell them anything about anything; for all is in bewildering confusion, and the rooms appear to change from east to west in the most perplexing way, as the excited children rush from place to place.

Muriel can tell them a little, though she is puzzled herself.

She has found her own little room at the top of the house, most unmistakably the 'small bedroom' of the advertisement. It is very small, with only a nail or two on the door by way of wardrobe, and the careful little lady wondeis where her muslin dresses can possibly be kept.

# The Proud Lady

'Is this your room, Mu? How jolly!' cries Lance, with a quick look all round; 'and what a jolly picture! Not much in your line, though,' as the hunting-coats catch his eye. 'If I'm to have the room with "Home, sweet Home," I'll change pictures, if you like.'

Muriel gladly consents, for in her heart of hearts she thinks 'Home, sweet Home' sweetly pretty and distinctly touching, though she would not for the world confess the same to her unsentimental brothers and sisters.

By nightfall everything is more or less in order, though excursions have to be made from one room to another in search of particular possessions which seem to have gone amissing in the general confusion.

And then—morning!

Morning, when the grass is grey with

dew, and the milk-girl plods through the drenching fields leaving traces of her progress in long, dark footprints.

O the fields and the dew!

Who can disobey their summons to come out into the freshness of a new, long, beautiful, splendid day?

Not the seven eager town children who are out of doors long before the breakfast-bell rings, and who come in laughing and rosy laden with country treasures, flowers, and feathers, and quaint, odd pebbles.

It does not take many days to discover the chief points of interest in the neighbourhood.

Ferdinand and Isabella take possession of the stream where the water-cresses grow, and many a plateful of thick bread and butter is transformed to drawing-room fare under their hands.

Muriel is acknowledged queen of the

bank which slopes up to the hedge, and where a most delightful afternoon may be spent over *Little Women,* or *A Tale of Two Cities.*

Lance guards the stepping-stones, and pilots all travellers safely across, and Addie and Josephine distribute flags and rushes to all who may require them.

Only Diana has no special office of her own. It is a great grief to her that their tree cannot be climbed. It is quite an impossible feat, as she discovered the very first morning, her poor scratched hands bearing witness to the unsuccessful attempt.

She constitutes herself Village Messenger, as one must have a position of some sort, and soon she is able to give the local news to the family.

The market is held at the nearest town, seven miles away, and Tuesday is market

day. That is why so many droves of sheep are to be met on a Monday, and why the farm people are so early astir on Tuesday morning.

Butter is at its freshest on market day, and it is best to choose the fair round pats, stamped with a corn sheaf; for Cross Bank farm is famed for its butter all over the countryside.

And Wednesday is muffin day. They come by train, and should arrive by dinner-time; but sometimes, when the train is late, there is barely time to have them toasted for tea.

Nobody seems to know where the muffins come from, but they duly make their appearance every Wednesday, and are eagerly welcomed by visitors from the North, the baker is proud to inform you.

And the neighbours!

# The Proud Lady

By the end of the first week most of them are known by sight, and the rest by reputation.

Therefore, when Ferdinand and Isabella rushed up the hill one morning to ask—

'Who is the owner of a pair of bays?' Diana promptly asked—

'What kind of a carriage?'

'An open Victoria sort of thing,' Ferdinand shouted.

'Then it must be Mrs. Markham. She has a Victoria.'

'No, it isn't Mrs. Markham. She has red hair, and this lady is much smaller.'

'One of her visitors, perhaps.'

'Oh no, I am sure it is her own carriage,' said Isabella. 'She lay back among the cushions as if everything belonged to her.'

'What is she like?'

'Very small, and she wears a black hat,' Isabella began.

'And fur round her neck,' added Ferdinand.

'Fur in July?' cried Di incredulously.

'Well, feathers, then. And she lay back in the cushions, and looked ever so proud. And you can't think what a scornful glance she gave us as we passed.'

Di was puzzled.

Not Mrs. Markham, and not old Mrs. Burne, for she had the kindest face in the world.

'It must be Lady Vere,' she declared at last.

It is a curious fact that when a certain subject is mentioned, apparently for the first time, it repeatedly comes up in the course of conversation; and though Di was a little surprised, she was quite prepared for the stream of questions coming from one and another of her brothers and sisters.

# The Proud Lady

'I say, Di,' exclaimed Lance at tea-time, 'who is the little lady who drives about in state, coachman and footman and all?'

'Yes,' added Muriel, 'I saw her this morning, and meant to ask you. She is evidently far too grand to stir hand or foot. I was quite disgusted to see the way the shop-people turned out to speak to her, and brought their things for her to look at. Do you know who she is?'

'Lady Vere,' Di announced calmly.

'Lady Vere!' said Muriel. 'Lady Proud would be a much better name'; and from that time forward Lady Vere came to be known in the family as the Proud Lady.

Endless were the stories and plays, concocted under the shade of the hedge, in which the Proud Lady figured.

Di's vivid imagination supplied the most extraordinary situations when a more

prosaic story-teller paused for lack of ideas, and in course of time the Proud Lady's name could scarcely be mentioned without a shiver of apprehension; for she was invested with all mysterious powers known to the children's minds, or invented to suit the required emergency.

The entrance to her fortress was guarded day and night by vigilant, fiery-tailed dragons, who could with one blow abolish the intruder; and woe betide the luckless being who should once fall under her displeasure, since with a single glance she could in a moment freeze the boldest to stone.

It was, therefore, surprising when one afternoon Di announced her intention of braving the perils behind those grim walls in her determination to catch a glimpse of the Proud Lady.

'Don't go, Di,' pleaded Muriel, who only

half believed the stories she wove for the younger children; 'apart from her being the Proud Lady, I don't think you ought to trespass.'

'I won't hurt anything,' Di declared. 'They can't put me in prison unless I am wilfully destructive. Can they, Lance?'

'No, I don't think so.'

'Don't go, Di, dear,' begged Josephine, putting her arms round Diana's neck. 'Supposing you were to get swallowed up!'

'Or changed into a stone!' suggested Addie.

'Or a frog!' put in Isabella.

Di considered.

'It's worth the risk,' she announced. 'We have been here for a whole fortnight, and I haven't seen her once, and I'm just longing to see her. You can have my corals if I don't come back, Josey.'

'To keep?'

'Yes. I shan't want them if I'm turned into something else.'

'I'd rather have your silver pencil.'

'But I've promised it to Addie.'

'Oh, well! Can I have them soon?'

'No. Only if I don't come back.'

'But supposing we saw a frog coming up the path, and we thought it was you, and Josey took the corals?' suggested practical Addie.

'Wait till after tea, at any rate. If I'm not back by tea-time, you may begin to think that there's something wrong.'

'It's muffin day,' Addie reminded her.

'So it is,' said Di. 'Of course, I'll be back for tea. If I meet the Proud Lady, I'll dance up to her and sing, "Oh, do you know the Muffin Man?" and she will be so surprised, that she'll forget to turn me to stone.'

'You can't count on that,' Ferdinand warned her. 'You had better carry a charm of some sort.'

'What kind of a charm shall I take?'

'Take eyebright. It's splendid, and there is any amount of it in the field.'

'You must bring back a spray of white roses to show that you have been there,' Lance told her.

'Of course!' Di answered scornfully.

But Muriel protested.

'No, you mustn't take roses, Di. That would be stealing. It isn't a real Fairy Tale, you know.'

'But I must bring something back, Muriel.'

'Bring stones, then. She couldn't object to that. Bring seven white pebbles from the gravel in front of the house, and then we'll believe that you have been there.'

After a large bunch of eyebright had

been hung round her neck, Di was escorted to the foot of the hill by her brothers and sisters. There she took leave of them, and started forth on her quest.

She walked briskly along the dusty high-road, and presently came in sight of the formidable walls—not so very forbidding after all—and Di was a little disappointed to find the scramble over easier than she had expected.

There were other difficulties to be encountered, however, and by the time she had crawled from underneath the brushwood, her frock was torn in several places, her hair in a perfect tangle, and from her general appearance she was fit to be the heroine of the wildest romance.

A very short walk brought her in sight of the Proud Lady's dwelling—not, indeed, the impregnable castle of the children's imagination, for the low white house,

covered with roses and other creepers, seemed more like a large cottage than an enchanted palace; still, Di considered, it is never safe to judge from appearances, and she continued her journey with occasional thrills of alarm, for at any moment the Proud Lady herself might become visible, and Di required all the courage she possessed to face the unknown terrors of an encounter.

There were roses everywhere, Di noticed, and face to face with a large overgrown bush of beautiful single flowers, she remembered the required token of her valour —seven white pebbles from the gravel walk.

The path at her feet was well trodden, and at a glance Di realised that the pebbles she required were further on, nearer the point of danger.

She was horribly afraid to leave the

shelter of the bushes and make her way into the open ground in front of the house; still, it had to be done, and Di moved forward with timid steps.

One, two, three, four, five—she transferred the pebbles to her pocket.

Six—only one more to be found!

Seven!

That was done, then, and she could steal back unnoticed to her hiding-place.

But alas for her intentions, at this very moment the sound of rapidly approaching wheels broke upon her ear, and Di stood rooted to the spot, unable to move, realising that the worst had come to pass.

The horses drew up abruptly, and Di was face to face with the Proud Lady!

The Proud Lady seemed a good deal astonished at the unexpected sight of the dishevelled little maiden with flaming cheeks who stood so still; and Di was

equally surprised at the exceeding sadness of the Proud Lady's face.

She began to forget her fears in pity, when the Proud Lady startled her by asking—

'Have you come to see me?'

'Oh no,' Di answered quickly; then, realising that it was for that very purpose she had ventured forth, she blushed and stammered—

'At least, yes, it was for that.'

'How very nice of you!' said the Proud Lady, and she made room for Diana at her side, although the door was only a few yards further on.

When the door was opened, Di's terror returned, and she felt as if she must scream, for two men came forward carrying a chair to which a pole was fixed on either side.

It was not meant for her, however, she

was relieved to find, for the Proud Lady herself was helped into the chair, and Di was told to follow her into the house.

And then, in a flash, it came over her that the Proud Lady was lame.

A perfect flood of pity and tenderness rushed over her, filling her with remorse for all the hard things she had thought and said.

'And all the time she was lame, and we never knew.'

She followed the little lady into the cool, shaded drawing-room, and in a few minutes Di was established in a low chair at the side of her new friend.

All fear of the Proud Lady was gone for ever, and she wondered how she could ever have invented those horrible stories about that dear sad face with the pathetic eyes.

Was there nothing she could do, she

asked herself—nothing to help? And when the Proud Lady put up her hand to rearrange the cushions at her back, Di was on her feet in an instant, bending over her with a face all love and tenderness, with little soft hands giving the lightest touches to the troublesome cushions.

And then Di was drawn down to her low seat once more, and she found herself telling the Proud Lady all about her family and the interest of their lives.

The time passed so quickly that Di was amazed when the tea-tray was brought in, and with a little sudden laugh of amusement she realised that her absence at tea-time would give rise to the most terrible suspicions at House o' the Hill.

She laughed again when a dish of hot muffins was placed on the table, and the Proud Lady asked—

'Oh, do you know the muffin man?'

'Yes,' she answered, 'but we only learned about him this summer. We never had real muffins before. Mother used to play "Muffin Man" when she was a little girl.'

'So used I,' said the Proud Lady, and then she sighed, and, changing the subject, asked whether Di was fond of flowers.

'Oh, very!' cried Di; 'I love having them and playing that they are people and know things, but Muriel knows more about them than I do.'

'You must take her some roses, then.'

'Oh, may I? How lovely!' Di hoped that a white spray would be among them, to complete her Fairy Tale.

The Proud Lady chose two or three flowers from a vase at her side, and gave them to Di to wear; and as she tucked them into her belt, the fresh, sweet roses



DO YOU KNOW THE MUFFIN MAN?

came in contact with the little bunch of fading flowers tied so tightly together for a charm, and Di felt as if they burned out their horrible secret to all the world.

It was a very hot little face that bent over the flowers, and the Proud Lady, divining that something was wrong, led the conversation back to the safer subject of Di's brothers and sisters.

'Where do you come in the family?' she asked, and she laughed at Di's description of Ferdinand and Isabella, who had picked up their names nobody knew how.

'For their real names are Charles and Evelyn, only nobody ever calls them that.'

'Are any of you called by your own names, then?'

'Oh yes. Most of us are. Muriel is, and Josephine, and I am called Di, and

then Lance is sometimes called Lancelot. Only Addie is never called anything else.'

'What is her name?'

'Her real name is Adrienne, but we never call her that.'

'Why not?' asked the Proud Lady quickly.

'I don't know,' Di answered softly. 'I think she is called after some one who died.'

When tea was over, the Proud Lady sent for flowers—a great basketful of them—and when they arrived Di felt it was time to say good-bye, for the Proud Lady looked very tired.

Di made her way home somehow, scarcely heeding how she went, for all her thoughts were with the little lady in the big chair who had the dearest face in the world.

At the foot of the hill her meditations were boisterously interrupted by one and

another of the family who caught sight of the little figure in the torn frock, and rushed forward for an account of her adventures.

'You are just in time to save your corals,' Lance informed her. 'Josey had quite given you up. We have been in a terrible fix, for we didn't know what had become of you, and when we contemplated going to the rescue, Addie restrained us by pointing out that one frog in the family is more than enough, and to that we agreed.'

'No; but seriously, Di,' Muriel began, 'what have you been doing? Who gave you the roses? I hope you didn't take them?'

'Of course I didn't. Lady Vere gave them to me.'

'What! The Proud Lady! And you live to tell the tale?'

'Of course I do. The roses are for Muriel; and I like her very much, and she isn't proud at all, and she's lame,' cried Di, all in a breath.

'Don't excite yourself, old girl. Keep calm. She seems to have bewitched you pretty thoroughly.'

'Oh!' cried Josey, awestruck. 'Did she really bewitch you, Di?'

'No, I'm not bewitched, Josey. How can you talk such nonsense? As if the Proud Lady could bewitch me!'

'But you said she could, and that she could turn you into a stone. You did, Di. And you said I might have your corals if you were changed into anything that wouldn't need them. Didn't she, Addie?'

'Well, at any rate, it's all nonsense,' Di repeated. 'People don't bewitch nowadays; but even if they did, the Proud Lady wouldn't. She's *lame*, I tell you.'

'I don't see what being lame has got to do with it,' Ferdinand objected. 'You can be just as proud if you 're lame, can't you?'

'No you can't,' cried Di, taking up the cudgels for her beloved Lady, for all the world seemed arrayed against her, and it was more than Di could bear.

'Don't you see,' she went on eagerly, 'she couldn't go into shops if she 's lame.'

'Why did she scowl at us then, if she isn't proud?' asked Isabella.

'Oh, I don't know,' cried poor Di, harassed on all sides; and bursting into a sudden storm of tears, she fled up the hill to the shelter of her own room.

'It 's a clear case of bewitchment,' muttered Lance, and the little girls assented, for the unusual sight of Di in tears could be explained in no other way.

In about an hour Di made her appearance.

She took no notice of the allusions to her sudden flight, and seemed completely absorbed in the game that was going on.

Therefore when Ferdinand called out in great excitement—

'The Proud Lady's footman is coming up the road,' a very dignified little person turned her head in that direction.

Addie was frightened.

'I wonder what he wants?' she said.

'Oh, a message for Di, of course,' Lance announced. 'You had better meet him yourself, Di, since you say you are not afraid of her enchantments.'

'Oh, let me go!' cried Ferdinand, thirsting for adventure, and as Di made no objection, he darted down the hill.

'It's a letter for mother,' he shouted. 'Where is she?'

'In the drawing-room,' Muriel answered, and the whole family flocked into the house.

'Mother, mother! here's a letter for you from the Proud Lady. Do see what she says,' they clamoured; but when the letter was opened, they were frightened, their mother looked so strange.

At a hint from Muriel they stole out of the drawing-room, and lingered in front of the house; and when in a few minutes their mother appeared with her hat on, and announced that she was on her way to see Lady Vere, all the eloquence of the older children was required to soothe the terror of Addie and Josephine, who were convinced that the Proud Lady had cast her spell on their mother also.

A great deal of persuasion was needed to induce the two little girls to go to bed, and Muriel had not the heart to insist upon it, until Isabella volunteered to keep them company.

Ferdinand followed her example, since

the world to him, without Isabella, was a blank; and in a short time the three older children were left alone to ponder over the events of the day: Muriel calmly interested; Di defiant; Lance restless and impatient; all three longing for their mother's return.

For several hours they waited in the darkening drawing-room, and it was late before their mother's footsteps were heard coming up the little path.

The children drew her down to the low arm-chair by the window, and pressing round, listened in wonder to the story she had to tell; for it began years and years ago, not, as they had expected, with the Proud Lady.

For she spoke of her own childhood in the tall London house, when she and her little sister were left motherless, and their father could not bear to be parted from them even for a night.

And then she told how, all at once, they came to realise that Adrienne was a child no longer, for when her father refused his consent to her marriage with the man she loved, she had left the house secretly one morning and married him; and from that terrible day she had passed completely out of their lives, for all the letters she wrote were burned by her father unopened.

And then their mother told how the household had been broken up by her father's death and her own marriage, and how all these years not a word had come to her of the little sister she loved so dearly.

And all this time, their mother went on, not a word had reached Adrienne from those she had left, and her heart was broken by the dreadful silence.

And then her husband died in the far-away land to which he had taken her, and she was left alone.

And afterwards, she had married again, and new happiness came to her in the beautiful home to which she was brought, until the shadow of an overwhelming sorrow fell suddenly upon her. For one day her husband, called away by business, had left the house, and from that hour he had completely disappeared, and no word or trace of him could ever be found.

The shock, followed by days of wearing anxiety, brought on an illness from which she never completely recovered, for it left her lame for life.

All this their mother told, but long before the story had reached this point, Di's instinct had divined that their mother's sister was none other than Lady Vere. Now that the fact was revealed to her, she felt that she must have known it unconsciously all along, for her one thought on leaving her new friend had been, 'There

is nobody like you in all the world, except mother.'

And when Lance, pondering over the story, wondered—

'But why did she glare at Ferdinand and Isabella?'

Di laid her hand quickly upon his arm, and cried out—

'Hush! Don't you see? They reminded her somehow of mother, and it hurt her.'

The roses at her belt were drooping, and almost dead; but when the morning sun touched the little vase set lovingly to catch the first rays of light, they awoke in white and glowing crimson to the gladness of another day.

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